

cigar aficionado

THE GOOD LIFE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

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INSIDE THE NFL

WHO WILL WIN THE SUPER BOWL?

DANNY SHERIDAN PICKS THE WINNERS

HOW TO BEAT THE BOOKMAKERS

**JAY GLAZER AND DEAN BLANDINO—
THE FOX INSIDERS SPEAK**

SUPER NFL STADIUMS

FEATURING DICK BUTKUS •
JASON TAYLOR • ROBERT KRAFT



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PRECISION



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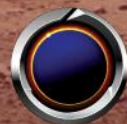
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september/october 2017

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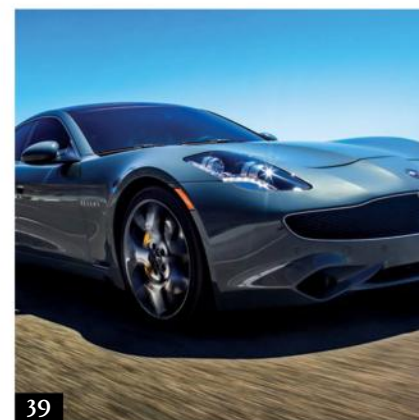
Danny Sheridan, our resident gridiron prognosticator, reviews 32 teams across two conferences and eight divisions to pick one to reach the pinnacle of Super Bowl success.

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After an inauspicious debut in 1920 the NFL put up a slate of early superstars and two games that changed the game to become America's sport.

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Both Fox NFL commentators, the scoop-hunting Jay Glazer and the former head of officials Dean Blandino discuss the state of the game in a comprehensive interview.



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ON THE COVER

The yearly battle for the Super Bowl starts now.



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98 STUNNING STADIUMS
Not only are luxury boxes more numerous and lush, but the current trend in stadium upgrades is bringing fans closer to the action—and creating new Super Bowl hosts.

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With \$100 billion risked on NFL football you can wager it's sucker bets that are keeping the bookies in business. Here's how to avoid the Monday morning blues.

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cigars

tasting 123 We rate 80 cigars in six sizes: Churchills (124), coronas (126), corona gordas (128), figurados (130), lonsdales (132), and robustos (134); plus Connoisseur's Corner, our vintage cigar tasting (138).

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88



78



98

highlights

Twenty-five cigars scored 90 points or more this impressive tasting, so it was inevitable that there were a few ties near the top. Cuba's Romeo y Julieta Short Churchill, a robusto with a big name, stood out from the rest with a score of 94 points, the highest of the issue. Tatuajue's La Vérité scored 92 points, outpacing all Churchills while Cuba's Montecristo No. 3 (92 points) took home top honors in the corona category. With a 92-point rating, Rocky Patel's Platinum Limited Edition Habano edged out the rest of the corona gordas, while three cigars—the Oliva Serie V Belicoso, 601 Red Label Habano Torpedo and Diplomaticos No. 2—scored 92 points each to top the figurados section. Another three-way tie occurred in the Lonsdale category, as the Illusione F9, Maestro del Tiempo 5205, and the Rocky Patel Decade Lonsdale all scored 91 points.



TOP ROBUSTO

ROMEO Y JULIETA SHORT CHURCHILL

CUBA

94

Covered in an attractive, near-claro wrapper, this smoke first debuted in 2006 at Cuba's annual Habanos Festival and has grown in popularity ever since.



TOP CHURCHILL

TATUAJE LA VÉRITÉ LA VÉRITÉ 2013

NICARAGUA

92

All the tobacco in this cigar is not only from a 2013 crop, but it all comes from the Garcia family's La Estrella farm in Nicaragua.



TOP CORONA

MONTECRISTO NO. 3

CUBA

92

This impeccably crafted smoke may not be as popular as other Montecristos, but it still packs plenty of flavor along with a tantalizing, golden-brown wrapper.



TOP CORONA GORDA

ROCKY PATEL PLATINUM LIMITED EDITION HABANO TORO

NICARAGUA

92

An offshoot of the Rocky Patel Platinum line, which uses Connecticut broadleaf wrapper, this limited smoke is covered in Ecuadorian Habano leaf.



TOP FIGURADO

OLIVA SERIE V BELICOSO

NICARAGUA

92

This strikingly well-made cigar tied with a Cuban Diplomaticos and a 601 from Nicaragua as the top-rated figurado of the issue.



TOP LONSDALE

ILLUSIONE F9

NICARAGUA

91

This all-Nicaraguan smoke tied with a Rocky Patel Decade as well as a Maestro del Tiempo for the highest-scoring lonsdale in this tasting.



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editors' note

Are You Ready For Some Football?

No sport looms larger in America than pro football. When the weather cools and the leaves threaten to fall from the trees, we look to the new season with unbridled excitement. While we may play plenty of golf, it's football that we watch with a passion.

There's nothing like sitting down for the big game, firing up a fat cigar and watching your favorite team take on its archrival. In the NFL, there are few unimportant games—each team plays only 16 games in the season, so most games count.

As we inched closer to the first game of the new season on September 7, we began putting together our largest-ever football package for your enjoyment. It begins with star handicapper Danny Sheridan making his predictions for the 2017 NFL season. Pay attention to what this man foretells. Last year he boldly—and correctly—chose the New England Patriots to go all the way and win the Super Bowl, despite knowing that star quarterback Tom Brady would be missing the first four games of the season. Sheridan not only calls the winner of the big game, but he predicts the way each team will finish in their respective divisions.

We also get up close and personal with Jay Glazer and Dean Blandino, two NFL analysts who know the game inside and out. Glazer has long worked the sidelines for Fox, getting the inside scoop on players. Blandino, an 18-year veteran of the NFL, joins Glazer this year on the Fox network. Writer Marshall Fine sat

down with the two men over cigars and wine to talk about issues facing the NFL and what we should look for this year.

And what's a great football game without a little money riding on the outcome? Our bettors' guide to the NFL will enlighten you—and maybe even lead you to a profit.

Our story on the extensive history of the NFL takes you from the early, leatherhead days of the game to the current era of high-flying offense and Patriot dominance. We bring you interviews with three men who have great perspective on the game, cigar smokers all: the formidable Dolphins' defensive end Jason Taylor, who nearly lost a leg to injury on the football field; owner Robert Kraft of the Patriots, who built a paragon among elite sports franchises; and linebacker Dick Butkus, one of the toughest men ever to don cleats.

We also introduce you to a new age in NFL stadiums. The latest venues provide previously unimaginable access to the game as spectators bask in the seats of luxury.

So sit back, light up your favorite smoke and enjoy the issue.

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"I wanted to produce
something I remembered.
I wanted to go back to my
childhood. I wanted to go back
to the happiest moments of my
life. I wanted my grandfather
to be proud of me. I wanted my
father to be proud of me and
my children to someday be
proud of me. It was something
I had to do."

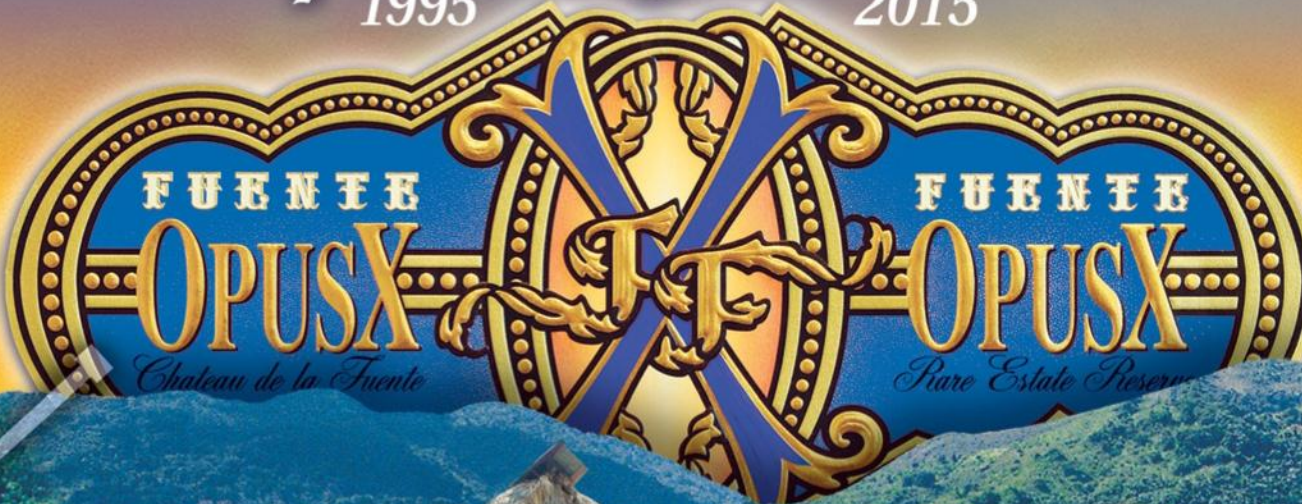
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out of the humidor

Dear Marvin,

I just read your letter to new FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb in the August issue of CIGAR AFICIONADO and was moved to contact the commissioner myself. This potential act by our government must not be allowed to happen. Let's hope that together we can all pull this thing through for the industry.

Wayne McCollum

Rancho Mirage, California

Editors' Response: The response from our readers to contact the new FDA commissioner has been overwhelming and impressive. Thank you for joining with so many of your fellow readers who answered the call. But more can be done, and it's not too late to enlist others to the cause. Spread the word with your fellow cigar smokers and make sure they join the fight. Go to www.cigaraficionado.com and follow our links to let the government know the FDA needs to leave handmade cigars alone.

Dear Marvin,

In reference to the Daymond John article ["A Shark With Style," June 2017] it was not only an outstanding write up but very inspirational. I live in Northern Virginia and work in I.T. project management and truly believe what he has done with his life is fabulous.

I also watch the show "Shark Tank" and find all their journeys very interesting and give them credit on what they have done with their lives and how it has affected others.

Sal Molé

Herndon, Virginia

Dear Marvin,

One Sunday morning long ago, sitting by the fire with my friend having bagels and coffee, she said, "This is so romantic," and I hummed in agreement. She asked what I was thinking of.

Years ago, at 16 years old, I must have done something stupid and my dad grounded me for the weekend. Rather than mope around, I built a bench. My dad was so pleased he let me go out on Sunday.

So I put that bench out on the land that got cleared for the cherry trees planted in my dad's memory, and



"I just read your letter to FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb. This potential act by the government must not be allowed to happen."
—Wayne McCollum, Rancho Mirage, California

40 years later that bench is still solid. Of course, the girl's long gone, but it seems rather romantic to me just to sit out there with a sunset and a cigar.

David Brinning

Naples, Florida

Dear Marvin,

In the June 2014 edition I commented on the absence of nationally syndicated sports talk icon Jim Rome in Kenneth Shouler's piece entitled "Sports Squawk." The feeling was mutual based on other reader letters that you printed, along with an Editors' Response stating "Romey" should have been included.

Much to my satisfaction—as well as other "jungle dwellers"—I read your piece on Jim ["Rome is Burning"] in the August 2017 issue.

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E-MAIL letters@cigaraficionado.com • **LETTERS** 825 8th Ave., 33rd floor, New York, NY 10019 • **EDITORS' BLOGS** Find out what the editors of CIGAR AFICIONADO are thinking—and smoking—in our editors' blogs. David Savona, Gordon Mott, Jack Bettridge, Gregory Mottola and Andrew Nagy want to hear from you. The conversation is taking place on cigaraficionado.com.

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Like the legendary Howard Cosell, Jim Rome did not play the game—but he certainly has his hand on the pulse of what today's sports fan really wants to talk about.

Nicholas J. Antonicello

Venice Beach, California

Dear Marvin,

A few months back I had my first cigar at the ripe old age of 40. It was fantastic. A few weeks later I purchased my first issue of CIGAR AFICIONADO and was blown away at how amazing your magazine was laid out and the vivid colors of all the pictures. I have not missed an issue since.

As a newbie I would love to see a beginner's section to further my knowledge of the cigar world.

Tyler Foxcroft

Prince George, British Columbia, Canada

Editors' Response: You're in luck. This issue has a story that covers some of the basics for those who are new to cigar smoking, as well as diving into details for seasoned veterans. Turn to page 140 to read "Ten Things Every Cigar Smoker Should Know." And our website, www.cigaraficionado.com, has an entire section dedicated to cigar education called Cigar 101. We also have a video gallery that will show you how to cut, light and select a cigar that's right for you. Welcome to the wonderful world of cigar smoking.

Dear Marvin,

It's rather ironic that, in spite of many public health concerns, marijuana dispensaries are popping up like dandelions while the cigar industry is under fire. Here in Oregon there are 418 registered medical marijuana dispensaries with 167 dispensaries in Portland alone. (You could probably count the cigar lounges on one hand.) What this demonstrates is that the real issues are ideological. Legalized pot—and the move to legalize it—enjoys the favor of the “new establishment,” which sees itself as progressive, tolerant and open. The cigar industry, however, is perceived as a vestige of the “old guard,” and, unlike the pot juggernaut, may be squeezed into oblivion with little political fallout.

The cigar industry might learn a lesson from the cannabis industry, which eroded resistance to full legalization through the clever appeal to marijuana's medical use. Perhaps the cigar industry should argue that smokers of premium cigars are more likely to be responsible citizens with good jobs and that they also enjoy greater mental health through the stress relief a premium stick provides. Maybe we should call our retail humidors “medical cigar dispensaries” and see what happens.

Fred Allen

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By DON PEPIN GARCIA





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Don Pepín García
FAMILY



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for I make my own rules:
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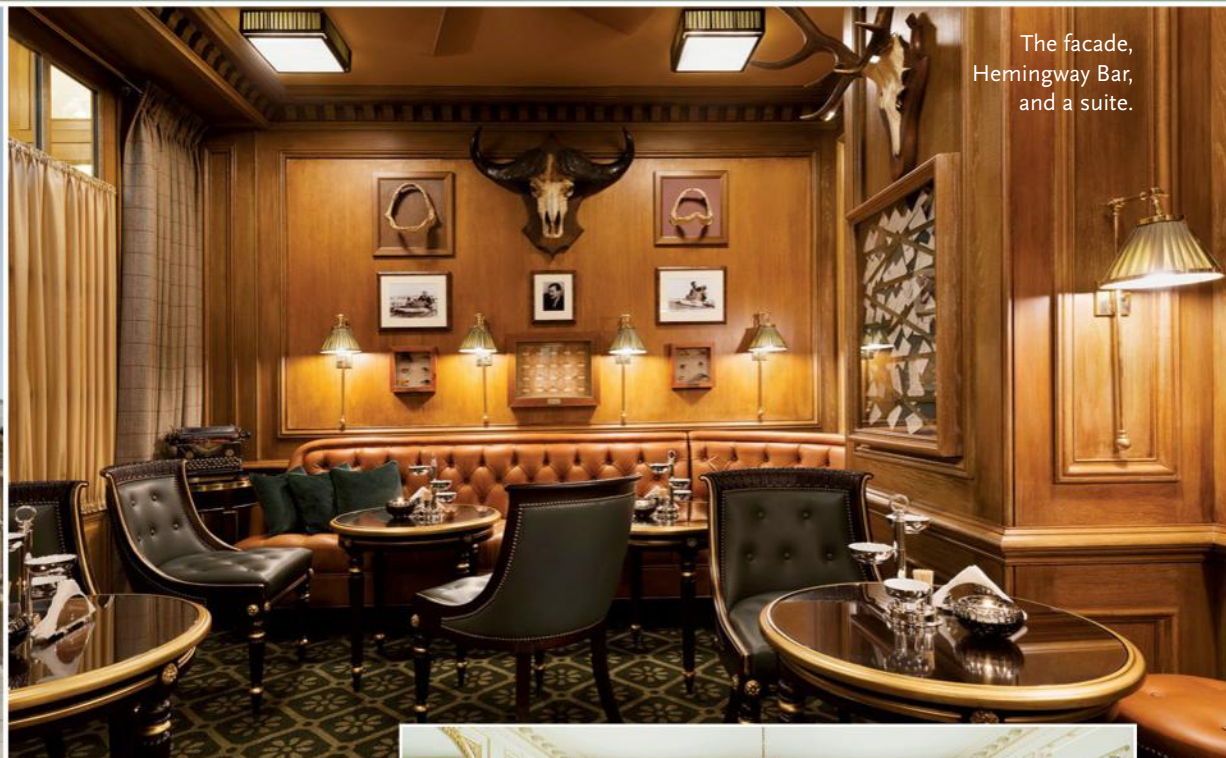
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good life guide

Living well demands that we indulge in things that are of superior quality and excellent origin. This guide aspires to find and recommend the best of everything to aficionados of the good life.

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The facade, Hemingway Bar, and a suite.

The Ritz Paris

Caesar Ritz managed and bought hotels in Nice, Monaco, Lugano and Lucerne before deciding to create one himself from the ground up with the help of the culinary legend chef Auguste Escoffier, his business partner. Opening in 1898, the Ritz Paris changed the hospitality industry forever. It earned Ritz the nicknames “king of hoteliers” and “hotelier to kings,” and spawned the expressions “ritzy” and “putting on the Ritz.”

For more than a century, the Ritz Paris, in the 1st Arrondissement, was the original “palace hotel,” the standard against which other luxury lodging worldwide was judged. It was the frequent abode of not only royalty, but billionaires, celebrities and VIPs of every stripe. Coco Chanel stayed for 30 years, while Gary Cooper and F. Scott Fitzgerald were regulars. Ernest Hemingway drank there so frequently that they named the hotel bar after him. It is now decorated with his personal memorabilia.

Yet the world’s most famous hotel was ready for more than a facelift, and the current owners undertook a \$450 million, four-plus year renovation under the watchful eye of renowned designer architect, Thierry Despont. In mid-2016 it reopened.

The Ritz is still very much the Ritz—only better. The goal was to completely but invisibly update the property without losing an ounce of its classic charm. The number of rooms was reduced to 142, while increasing their size (half are now suites). The bathrooms are fantastically upgraded, sporting vast walk-in showers, separate sunken tubs and heated floors. Flat-screens are framed like museum canvases, and behind the walls, the hotel’s guts have been rebuilt for superior water pressure and high-speed Internet. Beloved general manager Christian Boyens and bartending legend Colin Field both stayed. Field used the down time to perfect his



new masterpiece, the “Clean & Dirty Martini,” a version of Hemingway’s Dirty Martini, using frozen olive juice to tidy it up.

The two-story spa and health club was completely rebuilt and now includes the world’s first Chanel-branded beauty facility. The lobby houses five new luxury retail boutiques. The former Ritz Club nightclub became an elegant bar and brasserie serving classic French comfort foods. A retractable glass atrium allows patio dining all year round. Elaborate gardens create an escape in the beating heart of the city. A refined salon was added to serve afternoon tea. The Michelin-starred gastronomic eatery, L’Espadon, was redone, and the Ritz got a new executive chef, Nicolas Sale, who previously earned two stars at both of his Courchevel restaurants.

The many improvements here each seem subtle but quickly add up to real substance, and while the ambience of a bygone time has been preserved, the Ritz Paris has caught up to its newer ultra-luxury competitors, physically as well as in price, with the least expensive room starting at 1,000 euros (\$1,170). As Hemingway, the hotel’s biggest fan, famously remarked, “When in Paris the only reason not to stay at the Ritz is if you can’t afford it.”

Visit ritzparis.com

—Larry Olmsted

[illegible]

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Naim Audio Mu-so Wireless Speakers

You no longer need to buy a Bentley Mulsanne to enjoy the sound of Naim Audio. The English hi-fi manufacturer that produces the luxury sedan's optional sound system, "Naim for Bentley," now offers wireless speakers for the home. In addition to delivering the mellifluous sound you would expect from a high-end audio manufacturer, the Naim Mu-so and Mu-so Qb lend a modernist elegance to a living room, study, bedroom or all three.

The Mu-so is less a wireless speaker than a piece of modern art. A long, low aluminum slab, the unit gradually reveals competing shapes and textures. A softly undulating fabric grille collides with angular, brushed metal casing that gives way to a vertiginous silver heat sink that spans the back of the unit. Perched on a semi-transparent acrylic base, the slab appears to float.

Peel away the black fabric grill—also available in bold burnt orange, vibrant red and deep blue—and you'll discover six 75-watt amplifiers, 450-watts of total power channeled through the same high-performance digital processor Naim developed for Bentley. It will fill a palatial living room with crisp, full-bodied sound.

Perhaps the most ingenious and eye-catching feature is the unit's control dial. You can use the circular, illuminated touch surface circumscribed in a volume-adjustment ring to

pause and play audio, toggle between its inputs (3.5 mm, optical and USB) or select Internet radio stations that you customize using the Naim mobile app. In addition to physical inputs, Mu-so will connect to all of your devices using Bluetooth and Wi-Fi. About the only feature that's missing is connected home compatibility with Amazon Echo. Then again, Alexa is no substitute for that control dial.

You can tether multiple Mu-sos to stream music to up to five rooms simultaneously, in which case Mu-so Qb (pictured) offers a graceful addition to any bedroom. Despite its inelegant

name, the Qb compresses all the aesthetic grace and wireless capability of its larger sibling, and nearly as much power—300 watts dispersed across four 50-watt amplifiers and a 100-watt woofer—into an 8.5-inch polymer cube that fits comfortably on a bookshelf. It's a gorgeous device that's arguably preferable for urban dwellers.

At \$1,399 (Mu-so) and \$899 (Mu-so Qb), they're two of the most expensive wireless speakers on the market. But Bose and Bowers & Wilkins cannot rival Naim's surgical attention to detail. And you can remind your reluctant spouse that a Mu-so is considerably more affordable than a Bentley.

Visit naimaudio.com

—Will Fenton



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The Perfect Paella

There isn't an exact consensus as to what makes for a truly authentic dish of paella, but there is certainly no shortage of strong opinions. Ask a Spaniard from Valencia—the purported birthplace of paella—and you might get a completely different answer than someone from Catalonia. Trace the history and you'll find that this Spanish medley with crunchy rice has included everything from eels and snails to rabbits and rodents (specifically, water vole meat).

Now that the dish has gone global, it's not at all unusual to find spicy chorizo sausage in the mix, something that rigid hardliners find exceedingly irritating. And while some things are open to interpretation, the basic tenets of paella are not.

"I am not a purist of the paella, for I believe that it is fine to have some flexibility in the components, so long as you're in keeping with some basic rules" says Javier Estades. At work he is CEO of Tabacalera USA, but Estades doubles as a competitive paella maestro who has been perfecting the dish for most of his life.

To keep it real, you'll need a paella pan. That's not negotiable. This might be the most important part, as the word *paella* derives from the Latin for pan. If you don't have a gas stovetop large enough to support the pan, Estades recommends a self-contained burner and tripod kit from Garcima made especially for paella. This allows even heat coverage with better temperature control.

Secondly, you'll need to use Bomba or Senia rice. Also, cook in patient, flavorful layers. Don't make a lazy-man's paella by cutting corners. The secret, Estades says, is "adding and removing ingredients in the right sequence and then mixing them all at the end before you add the rice and broth."

For a meat-centric Valencia-style paella, most of the steps are fairly straightforward. First, heat your paella pan with olive oil. Then brown your pieces of chicken (and rabbit if you have it). Remove the meat to make way for garlic and seasonal vegetables. Runner beans are often used, artichokes too. Sauté until soft.

After that, add tomato puree and cook a bit before adding smoked paprika, saffron and then water. Cook it down in order to reduce your liquid. Then salt to taste. This is what turns the sum of your ingredients into a cohesive broth. That's when you add the rice. Simmer until cooked. The final, magical step is caramelizing the bottom layer. You're essentially burning the bottom of the rice to form what's called the *soccarat*. What's left should be a masterful mosaic of rice and proteins.

Seafood versions are also acceptable, but don't get too creative. Estades warns against blasphemous additions like tofu or corn on the cob: "If you try that in Spain and call it paella, you are sent to jail."

Visit paellapans.com

—Gregory Mottola

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Take a Shave

As he follows up a treatment of conditioning cream with a carefully applied hot towel to a stubbly face, Joe Bruno admits that the main point of a barber shave may not be to get the closest, smoothest trim possible. This intimate service, which used to be a regular part of a man's grooming, is now a nice luxury, a bit of occasional pampering. "It's a time to relax, it's time to zone out. We don't do a lot of things on their own nowadays. It's six or eight things going on at once. When you're getting a shave you can't answer your phone, you're forced to exhale."

Whatever the reason, the proprietor of Bruno's Chop Shop in Beverly Hills, California, is seeing an upsurge in request for shaves. Long after safety razors made home shaving a viable option and in an era when beards are in vogue, men are increasingly choosing an old-school service even if not on a daily basis.

As Bruno starts the next phase he explains that the traditional service has some new twists. "This is a clear gel that makes the blade slide smoothly. People expect hot lather, but I've never encountered one that doesn't dry the face." And if you're expecting a shave with a long straight razor, you won't get one—at least not in California, where state sanitation laws forbid reusing blades.

Instead he inserts a single-sided blade into a holder that's shaped and handles like a straight razor.

For health reasons, some barbers don vinyl gloves, but Bruno applies sanitizer to his bare hands as he prefers the sensitivity it affords. His strokes are a combination of the expected grand sweeps and short swipes. The reason: to adjust to the fact that men's beards grow in different directions on one face. Some even have cowlicks. The neck area is particularly erratic on many men. For optimum smoothness, his longer, deluxe shave includes two passes in each area: one with the grain and another across it.

When Bruno is satisfied with his tonsorial work, another towel comes out—this one is cold to shut the pores and reduce irritation. Two aftershave treatments include a skin astringent, applied as a disinfectant, and then a soothing balm.

The by-now-groggy client opens his eyes, strokes his face to check for smoothness and wonders if anyone falls asleep during the barber's ministrations.

"That's the best compliment I can get."

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—Jack Bettridge





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Karma Revero

Instant Karma it definitely wasn't. When the Danish designer Henrik Fisker brought his plug-in hybrid sports car to market five years ago he must have been paying for the sins of a past-life, because seemingly everything went wrong. The company went broke barely a year later, and its assets were sold off to China's Wanxiang Group. But while Fisker Automotive may be gone, the Karma is coming back to life.

Here it gets confusing, what was known as the Karma hybrid-electric vehicle is now the Revero. The reborn automaker is now known as Karma. What matters is the fact that it's an iconic design, as fresh and handsome as the day it first rolled out. Maybe even more so, as the now Chinese-owned, California-based carmaker has made a handful of welcome tweaks and refinements, most notably to the original car's "moustache" grille and diamond air intakes. Oh, and that distinctive new Karma badge—each one hand-painted, the company brags, by an artist in Hawaii.

The cabin has also been updated, giving it both a more refined look as well as the sort of cutting-edge technology you'd expect of a vehicle like this. That includes a much-improved infotainment system with such niceties as Apple CarPlay. Absent, however, are active cruise control and automatic emergency braking.

What's more likely to matter to potential buyers is what's under the Revero's hood. Karma has refined the original plug-in hybrid

package pairing a General Motors–derived 2.0-liter inline four with an electric motor drawing power from a 21.4 kilowatt-hour lithium-ion battery. That's slightly larger than the original version and boosts range to 50 miles in EV mode before the gasoline "range-extender" kicks in. There are now three distinct operating modes, including SPORT, which uses both battery and gas power to deliver more satisfying, if not benchmark, performance. You'll hit 60 in 5.4 seconds, a full second faster than the original version's launch time. One downside: when operating in gas-only mode, the Karma Revero manages only 20 mpg city, 21 highway.

The \$130,000 price tag is a bit daunting, all the more so compared with the original car's \$103,000 base MSRP. But the new model comes loaded, with even a solar roof that can generate several additional miles worth of current a day in places like sunny California. Just pick your exterior and interior colors. Ironically, the original Fisker Karma was imported from Finland, of all places.

Is it worth it? While it doesn't offer the performance of the similarly priced Tesla Model S P100d, the Karma Revero is about as visually striking—and as rare—as anything on the road. For those who want something green, or at least green-ish, to add to their personal car fleet, it's worth checking out.

Visit karmaautomotive.com

—Paul A. Eisenstein



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Hublot Classic Fusion Fuente 20th Anniversary

Carlos Fuente Jr., the charismatic self-professed “humble cigarmaker” at the helm of Arturo Fuente cigars, is passionate about family and symbolism. The sweeping lawn at Chateau de la Fuente, the Dominican farm where he grows wrapper for his Fuente Fuente OpusX cigars, is decorated with colorful pictures composed of painted rocks that pay tribute to his parents and his grandparents.

So, it's only fitting that the third Arturo Fuente watch produced with Hublot got personal. “Every little symbol on the back and front has an emotional, strong meaning to the family,” Fuente says during the unveiling of three Hublot Classic Fusion 45mm Fuente 20th Anniversary Special Edition watches at the Chateau, where a new cigar club decorated with family photos has opened. “It is about people, it's not about cigars.”

Fuente created the Fuente Fuente OpusX cigar brand more than 20 years ago to show the world that great wrapper could be grown in the Dominican Republic. The anniversary is referenced on the watch with two prominent Xs (20 in Roman numerals) on the dial at 4 o'clock and marking the 12 o'clock hour. The blue dial (the favorite color of Carlos Jr.'s grandfather Arturo Fuente, the company founder) is also embossed with a pattern of interlocking Xs that repeats on the engraved bezel.

The watch's designer Manny Iriarte, a family friend and native of Cuba, boldly references Arturo Fuente's birth in Cuba, as well as his descendants' Cuban spirit. The elaborately engraved watch's case depicts Old Havana's wrought iron railings, Cuban tile patterns and tobacco leaves. On the case back is an image of Fuente Jr. and his father, Carlos Fuente Sr., who died last year. The engraved versions are available in Hublot's Magic Gold (\$30,400), an alloy of gold and ceramic, and brushed titanium (\$14,600). A third model in satin-finished black ceramic (\$13,600), which cannot be engraved, offers a less ornate option. Each 45-mm watch is limited to 20 pieces, though Hublot CEO Ricardo Guadalupe promises a more accessible design soon.

Sales of the watches will benefit Fuente's Cigar Family Charitable Foundation, which sponsors school development, medical facilities and other local projects. “Hublot understood our responsibility to give back,” says Fuente, who notes that a nursing school is currently being built with funds from watch sales. “The mentality is not only about the most sought-after luxury products, it's being able to give back and build relationships, because that's what brings a smile to our hearts.”

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—Laurie Kahle




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The Highball

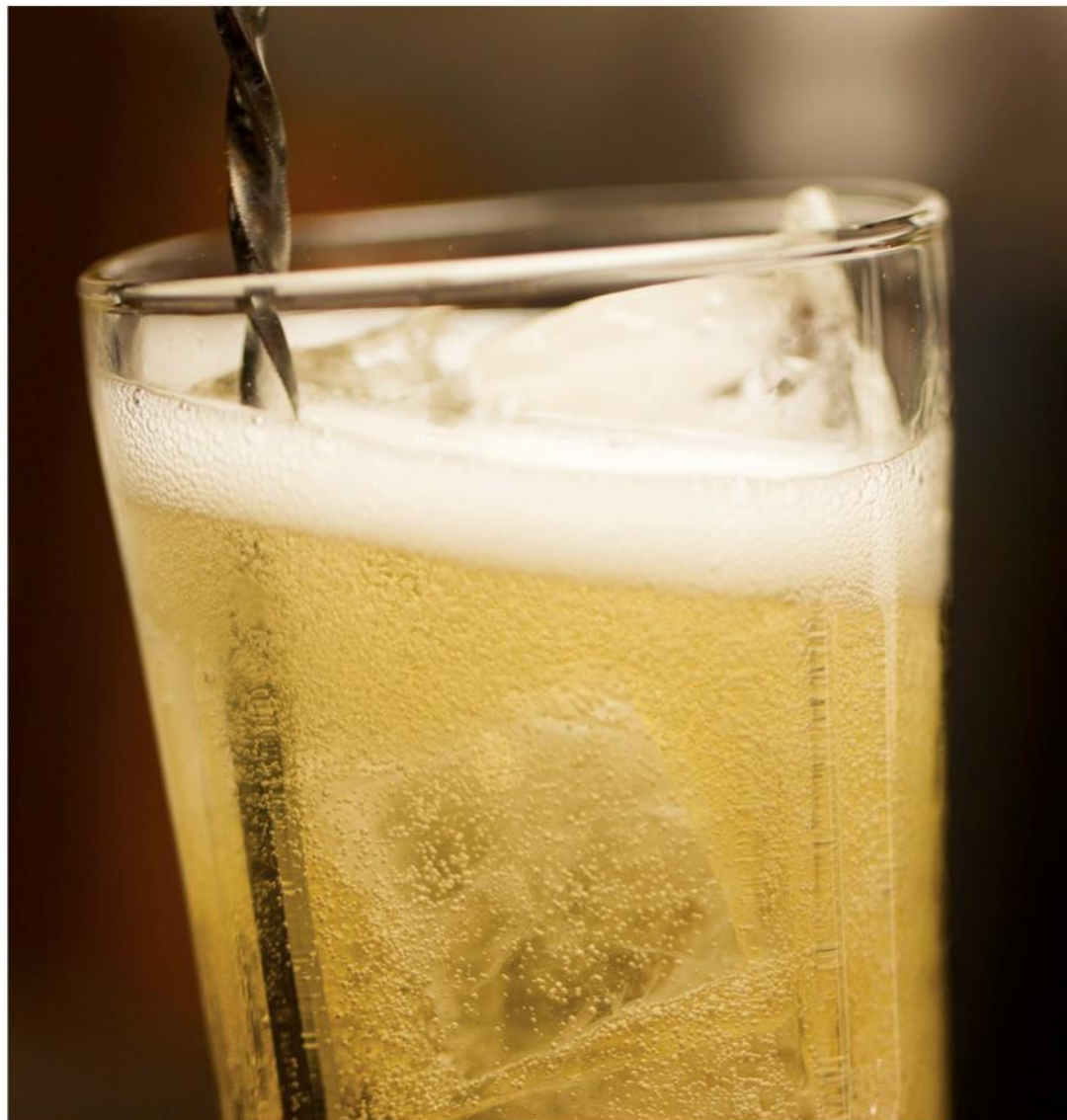
If you judge by volume consumed in a lifetime, the Highball is easily my favorite mixed drink. So I find its recent elevation by the Japanese bar culture, with its reverent ceremony, gratifying. However, their slow build approach—chiseling ice, layering components and stirring exactly 13½ times, puts a damper on the consumption angle. Therefore, herewith is a primer on the drink without the ritual.

Spirit content: A Highball is technically almost any spirit and mixer served in a Highball glass, but we'll ignore Gin & Tonics and Rum & Cokes and narrow the focus to brown liquor with sparkling water. Traditionally this meant blended Scotch, but any whiskey can improve the taste of seltzer—and vice-versa. Japan has developed its own whiskies—such as Suntory Toki—specifically for that purpose. The Canadian whisky drinkers of the Mad-Men era understood that bubbles added burst to that smooth alcohol. Almost any straight rye or Bourbon has the stamina for this drink. And don't feel that it's a waste of precious single malts, especially peaty ones that give up their marine notes in a spray of club soda. And lest we forget, Jeeves regularly served B&S (Brandy & Soda) to rescue the hapless Bertie Wooster from a funk.

The proportion: This is totally subjective. The Japanese lean to lower-proof ratios, but if you're using a high-quality spirit you might want to start at one-to-one and fine-tune in stronger or weaker proportions from there.

The glass: As the name implies this is key. A Highball should come in a tall, thin vessel—the better to distribute ice throughout the liquid and keep the surface area (where it loses fizz) to a minimum. Taller, thinner Tom Collins glasses are just as good. Tubby Old-Fashioned glasses are unacceptable and should be sent back to the bartender with a stern talking to. Twelve ounces is maximum capacity. If you're feeling underserved, order a second.

The additive: The Seven & Seven notwithstanding, we're talking carbon dioxide and pure water, not soda pop. The choice is seltzer water or club soda (the latter contains salt). If your barman is gunning down your drink with soda from a hose, dismiss him.



Bottled soda is fine in small (circa eight-ounce) formats. Vessels defined in liters lose fizz on the way down. Or you can make your own—with your choice of water. The old-school soda syphon is fun for its Three Stooges theatrics, but more convenient are gadgets like SodaStream and Drinkmate (see page 160), which let you customize the amount of CO₂ with fewer or more blasts.

Ice: Speedy melting makes crushed and chipped ice the enemy. Large square cubes stack nicely in a highball glass and offer consistent cooling throughout the drink. If you don't want to spend precious drinking time prepping ice with a chisel, get a classic ice tray. Some home icemakers even dispense ice that stands up to dilution. A universal Highball rule of thumb: If you find clear liquid and no ice in the last inch of the glass, something has gone terribly wrong.

—Jack Bettridge



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Rock Climbing

If you've ever dreamt of—but still feared—dangling from ropes and a harness a thousand feet above Yosemite National Park, it's easier than you think. You won't start on the sheer face of Half Dome, one of the park's fabled features, but the sport of rock climbing is accessible to a range of people that extends far beyond fitness-obsessive physical specimens. And opportunities may be closer than you think.

"I took a four-year-old climbing on Monday and I've taken 70-year-olds," says Carolyn Riccardi, an experienced rock-climbing instructor in the Shawangunks, a ridge of bedrock about 90 minutes north of New York City that offers some of the best rock climbing available in the United States. "I've taken people who look like football players and ballet dancers."

AMGA-accredited rock climbing schools (that's the American Mountain Guides Association) offer introductory one- and two-day courses in the \$175-to-\$300 range. But many climbers make their first ascent at gyms on rock climbing walls. "These days the majority start indoors," explains Matthew Matera, a 23-year-old rock climber and one of the founders of Stanford University's competitive climbing team.

Rock climbing varies depending on where in the country you're pursuing it. The West Coast has larger "more aggressive" peaks, some as high as 14,000 feet. Utah is known for its sandstone climbing. My challenge began at the Shawangunks, a.k.a. "the Gunks." I donned climbing shoes, a helmet and harness, while my instructor ran a rope from an anchor at the summit of the modest cliff I was supposed to climb. He then threaded it through my harness. The 30-foot ascent was intimidating, nonetheless.

Because the rope functions as a safety device, not a hoist, I was expected to accomplish the climb using my own questionable strength. Nevertheless, with experience, you come to rely less on sheer physical power. You also get a sense, however fleeting, of how profoundly engaging the sport can be—and not just because you have a vested interest in returning to your friends and family alive. It's as much about sightseeing as testing your strength and endurance. And perhaps also about putting things in a larger perspective.

"As a sport it's allowed me to get to some incredible places," Matera says. "It's a humbling experience."

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—Ralph Gardner Jr.



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For cigar accessories, black is the new black. With the color's understated sophistication and ability to accessorize with almost anything, black has never gone out of style. Moreover, any cigar aficionado looking to deck out his den in dark tools will find an array of choices available now.

Start with a proper black ashtray. The Colibri Quasar (\$150) is an eye-catching receptacle constructed from metal alloy. It boasts a modernist, multifaceted body with space for six cigars. The melamine base has nonscratching rubber footpads.

The Xikar 009 Pull-Out Punch (\$44.99) is a sleek, bullet-shaped cigar cutter with a retractable, circular blade. Tug on the body of the punch, applying force in opposite directions, and a razor sharp 9-mm blade jumps out. After punching a hole in the cap of your cigar, gently push the Pull-Out Punch back together and the circular blade withdraws into the cutter.

Brizard & Co.'s Venezia Fountain Lighter (\$220) has a

powerful jet flame that overcomes windy, outdoor conditions (e.g. on a golf course or boat). But with its leather wrapping, the lighter is just as at home in a smoking lounge. Pictured in black caiman, the Venezia also comes in stingray and ostrich leathers.

A reliable humidor will anchor your collection. The Daniel Marshall Ambiente 125 Cigar Humidor comes in a black matte finish (\$445). Marshall's humidors are known for their quality, construction and spot-on humidity control. This model has a gold-plated lock and key, a solid Spanish-cedar interior, a preinstalled humidification system and digital hygrometer.

Now that you've laid the foundation for a respectable set of black cigar accessories, you can expand on the premise, because black matches with everything and you'll only enhance the decor.

Visit brizardandco.com, colibri.com, danielmarshall.com, and xikar.com

—David Clough



Cirrus SF50 Vision Jet

You may recall a John Sebastian song from the '60s called "Younger Generation." It describes a future in which three-year-olds test their parents' patience by asking permission to ride their "zooms." That's a vehicle that "goes 200 miles an hour suspended on balloons."

Well, the future has arrived in the form of Vision Jet, the world's first single-engine personal jet. And while the flying machine may be slightly beyond the capacity of a toddler, the pilot/owner has very little responsibility beyond locating his favorite Sirius XM radio station.

"It's remarkably simple to fly," explains Ben Kowalski, Cirrus's vice president for marketing and communications, as we head down the Hudson River past the Manhattan skyline. "You reach a point where there's not much more to do than sit back and enjoy the view."

The jet, which costs just under \$2 million and boasts a waiting list of 600, has a range of 1,150 miles and flies at 345 mph. Five of the aircraft have been delivered thus far.

The target demographic isn't corporate CEO's or rock stars that need to cross continents in a single bound. Rather it's being marketed as a "regional mobility" device that allows lawyers or real estate developers—very successful ones—to meet with multiple, far-flung clients in a single day. It also doubles as a useful way for them to drop in on their kids at college or visit their

vacation homes on holiday weekends while soaring above traffic.

But let's dispense with details such as the most advanced avionics in the general aviation industry (pretty much everything is touch screen) and the muscular single-piece carbon-fiber fuselage, and get to the fun stuff. As useful as Vision Jet may be as a mode of transportation, it's basically a toy. The windows are huge, the interior, premium leather; cup holders abound and a USB charging port is at every seat. It carries up to five adults and two children. One of the seats can be replaced by a bathroom with a curtain.

But integral to its allure is that it's designed to be flown by a single pilot, which I did over Long Island, turning north over the Hamptons, and heading home.

Matt Bergwall, Vision Jet's product manager and our pilot, was by my side in case I tapped the wrong screen. But with the plane's stability augmentation system it was hard to screw up. Even better, it comes with a colorful parachute that, in case of emergency, will float the aircraft gently to Earth.

Hopefully you'll never have to use it. While the plane can't quite land itself, "it can bring us down right to the runway," says Bergwall.

And it did.

Visit cirrusaircraft.com

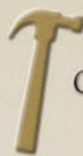
—Ralph Gardner Jr.



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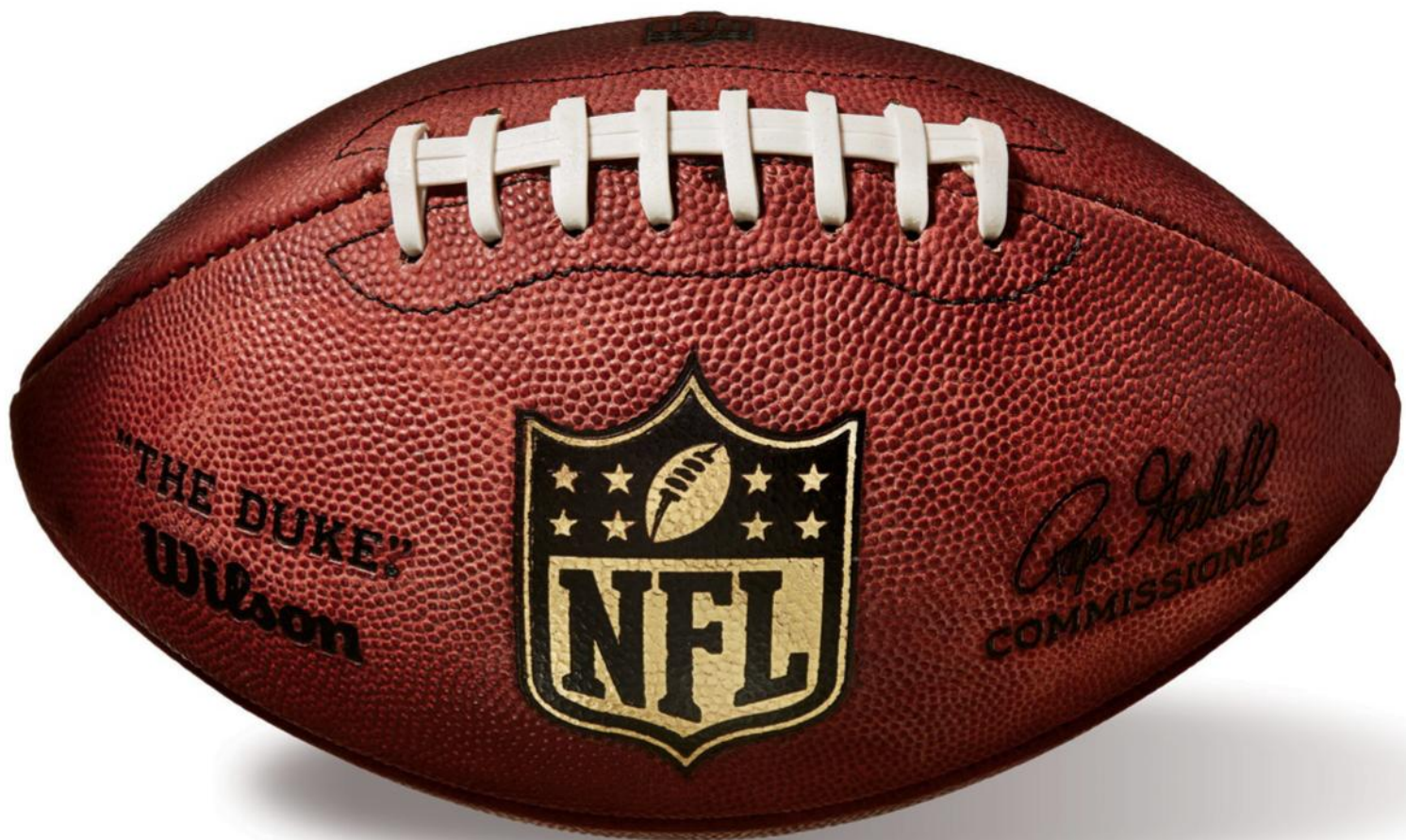
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2017

NFL PREVIEW

Who will rise and who will fall
in the upcoming NFL season?

Our gridiron guru gives
his predictions, all the way
to the Super Bowl

BY DANNY SHERIDAN

Superstar quarterback Tom Brady led his
New England Patriots to the greatest
comeback in Super Bowl history against
the Falcons. Can he do it again?



AFC EAST

Miami receiver Jarvis Landry helped the Dolphins to their first playoff appearance in eight years last season, but don't crown them kings of the AFC East just yet. Matt Forte and the New York Jets don't have an answer for their woes, and are expected to struggle in 2017.



1 ► NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

The Russians couldn't hack this administration. In 23 years under the Kraft family, the Dynastriots have appeared in the playoffs 18 times, won a dozen division titles and five Super Bowl crowns. Returning from a four-game suspension, Tom Brady had arguably his greatest season (28 TDs, 2 INTs) with a league-best record of 14-2 and zero concussions (according to everyone except Gisele) despite the loss of TE Rob Gronkowski for eight games and the playoffs. The masterpiece was an overtime 34-28 Super Bowl win, overcoming a 25-point deficit (.04 % chance to win). Can they get better? The Pats have a new deep threat with WR Brandin Cooks, and the overlooked defense has been upgraded with DE Kony Ealy, CB Stephon Gilmore and ex-Jet David Harris. Are the Krafts the Belichick of owners? Or is Belichick the Kraft of coaches?

2 ► MIAMI DOLPHINS

The 10-6 Fish made the playoffs for the first time in eight years thanks to rookie coach Adam Gase, but this isn't the Joe's Stone Crab of franchises just yet. Miami faced only two top-five QBs, went 1-5 against teams .500 or better and the defense ranked 30th against the run. QB Ryan Tannehill (2,995 yards, 19 TDs, 12 INTs in 13 games) still hasn't had a breakout season. WR Jarvis Landry is the top playmaker, and RB Jay Ajayi surprised with 1,272 yards. More is needed from underachievers WR DeVante Parker and TE Julius Thomas. New defensive coordinator Matt Burke welcomes Lawrence Timmons and No. 1 pick edge rusher Charles Harris.

3 ► BUFFALO BILLS

Rex Ryan and Doug Whaley are out, but the Bills' 17-year playoff drought—the longest in the four major sports leagues—remains. New coach Sean McDermott steps in. It's snow job for a novice. Ryan was driven out with a week left in the season, leaving such a toxic waste that McDermott and new GM Brandon Beane cleaned house by dumping 14 coaches over Niagara Falls. LeSean McCoy remains the lone remaining star. QB Tyrod Taylor is back after surviving months of trade rumors (it would have been a \$9.7 million cap hit), and needs WR Sammy Watkins to stay healthy. No. 1 draft CB Tre'Davious White replaces Stephon Gilmore.

4 ► NEW YORK JETS

The Jets (5-11) remain in freefall. They've gone six seasons with no playoffs after back-to-back AFC championship appearances. It can only get worse if they get lost on their way to Del Frisco's or Elio's. The offense is morbid, and the latest bridge quarterback is 38-year-old journeyman Josh McCown, a 59% career passer who has lost 20 of his last 22 starts. Veterans Brandon Marshall, Nick Mangold, Darrelle Revis, Eric Decker and David Harris were swept away by GM Mike Maccagnan's rebuilding. No. 1 pick S Jamal Adams is a stud, but Leonard Williams and Muhammad Wilkerson better pressure quarterbacks to help the secondary. Sundays will be as painful for Jets fans as watching an old Sean Spicer press briefing. Coach Todd Bowles (15-17) better rent.



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AFC NORTH

Injuries and a slow start couldn't stop hulking quarterback Ben Roethlisberger and his Pittsburgh Steelers. Expect them to have another winning year, unlike the suddenly struggling Cincinnati Bengals, despite talented playmaker Andy Dalton.



1 ► PITTSBURGH STEELERS

The Steelers overcame a 4-5 start and rolled off an nine-game winning streak that took them to the AFC Championship game. QB Ben Roethlisberger shook off injuries to lead the way (3,819 yards, 29 TDs, 14 games). The studs were Le'Veon Bell, the NFL's top all-purpose back in only 12 games (1,268 yards rushing, 616 yards receiving) and WR Antonio Brown (106 grabs, 1,284 yards, 12 TDs and one foolish video in the locker room the week before getting routed by the Patriots). Getting back WR Martavis Bryant and drafting USC WR JuJu Smith-Schuster should make the offense more explosive. Fans are hungry for someone to help James Harrison and Bud Dupree bring the Steel Curtain down on opposing quarterbacks. No. 1 draft pick T.J. Watt, J.J.'s baby brother, will make the fashionable crowd at Meat and Potatoes quite happy.

2 ► BALTIMORE RAVENS

The Birds have gone 31-33 since Super Bowl XLVII, failing to make the playoffs in three of the last four years. QB Joe Flacco had somewhat of an off year with a career-low 20 TDs and 15 INTs, but Coach John Harbaugh isn't concerned. "Our quarterback is a championship QB and he's proven that," he said. Dennis Pitta led all TEs with 86 catches, but was released, leaving a big void, and Flacco will also miss retired WR Steve Smith. Ex-Chief Jeremy Maclin was a shrewd signing. RB Danny Woodhead is a nice safety valve, but 2015 No. 1 draft WR Breshad Perriman needs to emerge. GM Ozzie Newsome upgraded an ailing pass rush with rookie

OLBs Tyus Bowser and Tim Williams, and adding Tony Jefferson and Brandon Carr give the team an elite secondary.

3 ► CINCINNATI BENGALS

The 6-9-1 Bengals grossly regressed from their winning 2015 season and missed the playoffs for the first time since 2010. Coach Marvin Lewis has never won a playoff game. The Bengals have talent on offense: QB Andy Dalton (4,206 yards); WR A.J. Green (964 yards); WR Brandon LaFell (862 yards) and added John Ross, the fastest receiver on the board (4.22 speed). They drew criticism for taking RB Joe Mixon, who has domestic violence baggage. They would take a long look at Hannibal Lecter if he could play.

4 ► CLEVELAND BROWNS

It was another boneless year for The Dawg Pound, as the Browns went 1-15 (complete with a 14-game losing streak) for their ninth straight losing season, continuing the endless Remake On The Lake. The hope around town is that the analytic decision makers used their draft picks judiciously: first-round picks DE Myles Garrett (Texas A&M), DB Jabrill Peppers (Michigan) and TE David Njoku (Miami) could all start. The Browns, who have auditioned 26 quarterbacks since 1999, now look to rookie DeShone Kizer to end their merciless curse. The NFL has relaxed its touchdown celebration rules. Now all the Browns have to do is find the end zone. Hey, at least they had a better off-season than Tiger Woods!



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AFC SOUTH

Lamar Miller's (No. 26 at right) rushing is a big reason the Houston Texans will repeat as winners of the AFC South this season. Division rival Tennessee comes to 2017 with a tougher pass defense, but will struggle by comparison.

1 ► HOUSTON TEXANS

In three years, coach Bill O'Brien turned a 2-14 team into strong playoff contenders, using eight different quarterbacks and winning the South the last two seasons. The Texans could have challenged for the Super Bowl, but QB Brock Osweiler turned out to be an \$18 million bust. They reached the divisional round against New England on the strength of a No. 1 defense, despite not having J.J. Watt. The defensive end returns to join Jadeveon Clowney and Whitney Mercilus, but O'Brien is hoping that No. 1 draft Clemson QB Deshaun Watson can supplant Tom Savage sooner rather than later and ignite RB Lamar Miller (1,073 yards) and WR DeAndre Hopkins (954 yards). Too bad they couldn't sign Tony Romo.

2 ► INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

Owner Jim Irsay, who likes Twitter as much as the man in the Oval Office, fired GM Ryan Grigson after five years of bad drafts and free-agent busts and hired talented Chris Ballard from Kansas City. Injured QB Andrew Luck somehow did his part with 4,240 passing yards and 31 TDs. A young, growing offensive line offers hope that Luck will last longer than Kardashian reruns. He needs more playmakers than T.Y. Hilton and Frank Gore. Upgrading the defense was critical. No. 1 pick Malik Hooker, Johnathan Hankins and Jabaal Sheard will help. These are certain: death, taxes, Adam Vinatieri and the tear-duct shrimp cocktail at St. Elmo's.

3 ► TENNESSEE TITANS

The Titans (9-7) enjoyed their first winning season since 2011 behind QB Marcus Mariota. The second-year QB upped his passing yardage to 3,426 with a rating of 95.6, but he needs more go-to guys like RB DeMarco Murray (1,287 yards), WR Rishard Matthews (945 yards), and TE Delanie Walker (800 yards). Joining them is No. 1 draft Western Michigan WR Corey Davis and ex-Jet Eric Decker. The Titans improved their pass defense by signing CB Logan Ryan and S Johnathan Cyprien and using their other first-round pick on USC CB-KR Adoree' Jackson. Nissan Stadium has a chance to be more popular than the Johnny Cash Museum.

4 ► JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS

The Jags haven't had a winning season in a decade, which is why they brought back revered coach Tom Coughlin as executive VP of football operations. "It's a tough game," he announced. "You have to play through some things." Remember, he's a fan of Gen. Patton. QB Blake Bortles (51 INTs over three years) has grossly underachieved. The absent running game improved overnight for new coach Doug Marrone with No. 1 draft pick Leonard Fournette from LSU, the Andalusian Bull of the collegiate ranks. The defense was strengthened by signing Calais Campbell, A.J. Bouye and Barry Church. The Jags have played in London every year since 2013. They need to start giving their American fans a better show.

AFC WEST

Quarterback Derek Carr of the Oakland Raiders drops back to pass against the Kansas City Chiefs in one of the nastiest rivalries in the entire NFL. Kansas City came out ahead last season, but Oakland will finish first in 2017 before moving to Las Vegas in 2020.

1 ► OAKLAND RAIDERS

If \$25 million QB Derek Carr didn't break his fibula in Week 16, the Raiders might have challenged for the Super Bowl. Carr (3,937 yards, 28 TDs) took a dysfunctional team that had gone 13 seasons without winning and won a dozen games. Amari Cooper (83 catches, 1,153 yards) and Michael Crabtree (89 receptions, 1,003 yards) form a dynamic duo, and new TE Jared Cook is a threat. RB Marshawn Lynch comes out of retirement to replace Latavius Murray (788 yards, 12 TDs). Cordarrelle Patterson is a dynamic kick returner. Defensive Player of the Year Khalil Mack is the catalyst on a defense fortified by No. 1 pick Gareon Conley. The Raiders are built for another playoff run before Wayne Newton welcomes them in 2020 to their new Vegas home. Just Sin Baby!

2 ► KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

For the first time in six years, the playoff-hardened Chiefs (12-4) won the Wild Wild West. QB Alex Smith is a classic game manager (3,502 yards, 15 passing TDs, 5 rushing TDs), but he hasn't taken the Chiefs to the next level. Dynamo RB Tyreek Hill scored 12 TDs and RB Spencer Ware, who will be pushed by rookie RB Kareem Hunt, produced most of the ground yardage. Coach Andy Reid traded up in the draft to grab Texas Tech QB Patrick Mahomes, a raw gunslinger who has a big arm.

3 ► DENVER BRONCOS

Vance Joseph gets his first head coaching gig in a strange hire—his Miami defense finished 29th in the league. Thanks to sackmaster Von Miller and a No Fly Zone secondary, the Broncos have a tough defense, but their 29th-ranked offense is led by Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch, two questionable quarterbacks who need tutoring. Denver's last pick in the draft, Mr. Irrelevant Chad Kelly, is a talented-but-troubled QB who could turn out to be a sleeper. Most of the offense came from WRs Demaryius Thomas (90 grabs, 1,083 yards) and Emmanuel Sanders (79 catches, 1,032 yards). The Broncos have to find a running attack, and No. 1 pick LT Garrett Bolles and G Ronald Leary should help. They gambled on ex-Chief Jamaal Charles, who has missed 24 games in two years.

4 ► LOS ANGELES CHARGERS

After 55 years in San Diego, the Chargers fled to L.A. with new coach Anthony Lynn, who inherited a 5-11 mess. The Bolts had an NFL-high 21 players on IR and 35 different offensive line combinations. QB Philip Rivers (4,386 yards, 33 TDs) deserves better. Drafting Clemson WR Mike Williams with the seventh overall pick was smart, and if WR Keenan Allen can stay on the field, look out. With a league-record ticket price (\$192) the Chargers won't have to worry about a rabid fan base in a 27,000-seat stadium.



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NFC EAST

Dynamic wideout Odell Beckham Jr. will have more help this season with the addition of receiver Brandon Marshall and tight end Evan Engram, powering the New York Giants past the powerful Dallas Cowboys. Philadelphia and Washington will bring up the NFC East rear.



1 ► NEW YORK GIANTS

A dominant defense rescued an underachieving offense (36 TDs, down from 47) and got the Giants into their first playoffs in five years. “We were lucky to get 11 wins,” said coach Ben McAdoo. And lucky that DT Snacks Harrison was intent on devouring running backs instead of the pastrami at Katz’s Deli. Eli Manning, enough on the back nine of his career that GM Jerry Reese drafted Cal QB Davis Webb in the third round, was just a bit above average despite his 4,027 yards and 26 TDs. He threw 16 picks and lost four fumbles behind a weak offensive line. Manning will have more firepower with the additions of WR Brandon Marshall, who joins wondrous powder keg Drake pal Odell Beckham Jr. (101 catches, 1,367 yards) and dynamic No. 1 draft Ole Miss TE Evan Engram.

2 ► DALLAS COWBOYS

Now that the Tony Romo soap opera is over, QB Dak Prescott will take full charge in Dallas. Prescott and RB Ezekiel Elliott exceeded expectations as rookies behind the best offensive line in the game. Prescott had a banner debut (3,667 yards, 23 TDs, 4 INTs, 104.9 rating) and Elliott led the NFL with 1,631 yards as Dallas (13-3) won the East after a 4-12 2015 nightmare. WR Cole Beasley had a breakout year as WR Dez Bryant was slowed by injuries. TE Jason Witten (69 catches) doesn’t realize he’s 35. Jerry Jones’ search for a war daddy pass rusher could be solved by LB Jaylon Smith, who missed his rookie season, or No. 1 draft DE Taco Charlton. The ‘Boys Will Be Boys’ have had seven players suspended and/or

arrested over the last two seasons. Jerruh has apparently mistaken pleamakers for playmakers.

3 ► PHILADELPHIA EAGLES

The Eagles flew to a 3-0 start as Pat’s and Geno’s were selling more cheesesteaks than anyone can remember. Rookie QB Carson Wentz created a buzz until midseason when LT Lane Johnson was slapped with a 10-game ban. Six of the nine losses were by eight points or less. Wentz was in sync with TE Zach Ertz (78 catches, 816 yards), but no one else. Power back LeGarrette Blount (1,161 yards, NFL leading 18 rushing TDs) provides balance alongside new receivers Torrey Smith, who has deep speed, and big target Alshon Jeffery. No. 1 draft pick Derek Barnett is the pass rusher Jim Schwartz craved to work alongside Fletcher Cox.

4 ► WASHINGTON REDSKINS

After going through 19 quarterbacks since 1999, Washington finally found a franchise QB in Kirk Cousins. Will he stay longer than *Sharknado* did in theaters? He faces 2017 without his top two receivers, Pierre Garçon and DeSean Jackson. Jay Gruden filled one void by signing towering Terrelle Pryor, who snagged 1,007 yards with the Browns. The Redskins upgraded their defense with three DBs from the draft plus Alabama DE Jonathan Allen. “We might not win a game,” defensive coordinator Greg Manusky crowed, “but we’ll sure beat the crap out of a lot of people!”



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NFC NORTH

Green Bay has one of the top players in the game in Aaron Rodgers, who brought the Pack all the way to the NFC title game despite little help from the ground game. Expect the Packers to beat out the Vikings, whose stadium will host this season's Super Bowl.

1 ► GREEN BAY PACKERS

Aaron Rodgers confirmed his status as a top-three QB when he took the Pack on a blistering run to the NFC title game after a lackluster 4-6 start. Faced with a tepid running attack (Rodgers led the team in rushing TDs with four) he willed his team to a six-game winning streak in crunch time. WR Jordy Nelson returned from a season-ending 2015 knee injury with 97 catches, 1,257 yards and 14 TDs while WR Davante Adams chimed in with 75 grabs, 997 yards, and 12 TDs. With the addition of TEs Martellus Bennett and Lance Kendricks, Rodgers has two more weapons in his arsenal. It will be Air Aaron more than ever with RB Eddie Lacy taking his prodigious appetite to Seattle, even if coach Mike McCarthy improved his 31st-ranked pass defense with draft picks Kevin King and Josh Jones, and the return of CB Davon House.

2 ► MINNESOTA VIKINGS

The Vikings were the only team in NFL history to open 5-0 and miss the playoffs. With Adrian Peterson shelved after three games, the Vikings fell to the bottom of the NFL in rushing. Replacements Latavius Murray and Dalvin Cook should be a nice 1-2 punch. Sam Bradford (3,877 yards, 20 TDs) and a fearsome defensive line reminiscent of the Purple People Eaters were among the few bright spots. Stefon Diggs and Adam Thielen need huge seasons for the Vikes to have a shot at hosting Super Bowl LII at home.

3 ► DETROIT LIONS

Matthew Stafford did all he could to get the Lions their first division crown in 23 years with a record eight fourth-quarter comebacks. Stafford, conjuring memories of the great Bobby Layne, threw for 4,327 yards and 24 TDs, and Golden Tate was his favorite target. Theo Riddick rushed for a paltry 357 yards and more is needed from Ameer Abdullah and a defense that wallowed. GM Bob Quinn upgraded the offensive line with RG T. J. Lang and RT Rick Wagner. Drafting jaw-breaking Florida LB Jarrad Davis in the first round was a necessity—getting Florida CB Teez Tabor in the second round was a steal.

4 ► CHICAGO BEARS

The winters are getting colder after the worst season (3-13) in Chicago since the 1970 AFL-NFL merger. The offense led the NFL with 31 turnovers, the defense had a league-low 11 takeaways and Da Bears went winless on the road for the first time ever. Jay Cutler is gone, and the new QB is Mike Glennon. Chicago panicked with its No. 1 draft pick, trading up to nab QB Mitchell Trubisky, who started only 13 games for North Carolina last year. RB Jordan Howard (1,313 yards) and WR Cameron Meredith (888 yards) are what's left of the offense unless Kevin White can fulfill his promise and replace Alshon Jeffery. "We're in striking distance to win," rhapsodized Coach John Fox. What? When? How?

NFC SOUTH

Atlanta boasted an impressive offensive game last season, with playmakers like wide receiver Julio Jones, shown breaking a tackle from Carolina Panthers cornerback Daryl Worley. The Falcons will shake off their Super Bowl loss to finish first in the NFC South.

1 ► ATLANTA FALCONS

The Falcons reached the Super Bowl and came *thisclose* to victory with the NFL's highest-scoring offense led by QB Matt Ryan (4,944 yards, 38 TDs, 7 INTs). Ryan is back, but offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan is gone. WR Julio Jones was amazing with his third straight 1,000-yard season (1,409) and RB Devonta Freeman led the rushing attack with 1,079 yards. DE Vic Beasley registered an NFL-high 15.5 sacks and welcomes partners in crime in UCLA DE Takkarist McKinley, the 2017 No. 1 draft, and mountainous DT Dontari Poe. The Falcons will move into their new billion-dollar stadium with the ability to repeat, so long as they can overcome a nagging Super Bowl hangover.

2 ► CAROLINA PANTHERS

The 6-10 Panthers were the first team in history to win 15 games then miss the playoffs the next year. QB Cam Newton regressed from MVP-worthy to mediocre: 3,509 yards, 52.9 completion percentage, 19 TDs and 14 INTs, with a lowly 75.8 rating. "Cam has to regain his confidence," moaned Coach Ron Rivera. RB Jonathan Stewart had only one 100-yard rushing game, so Carolina made multitalented RB Christian McCaffrey its top pick out of Stanford. McCaffrey can also catch passes and return kicks and help take the pressure off Newton and Luke Kuechly's defense.

3 ► NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

As long as QB Drew Brees is around, the Saints' offense will be as heavenly as the shrimp étouffée at Galatoire's. Brees turned in his fifth 5,000-yard season (5,208) with 37 TDs, 15 INTs and a 101.7 rating. He has WRs Michael Thomas (1,137 yards) and Willie Snead (895 yards) but lost 1,000-yard receiver Brandin Cooks in a trade to the Patriots. RB Mark Ingram had his best year (1,043 yards) but coach Sean Payton gambled on 32-year-old Adrian Peterson, who was sidelined for 13 games following knee surgery, and used a third-round pick on dangerous RB Alvin Kamara, who is as explosive as the firecracker shrimp at the Beau Rivage's Jia. The defense (31st in points allowed) welcomes No. 1 pick CB Marshon Lattimore to help pass rusher Cameron Jordan.

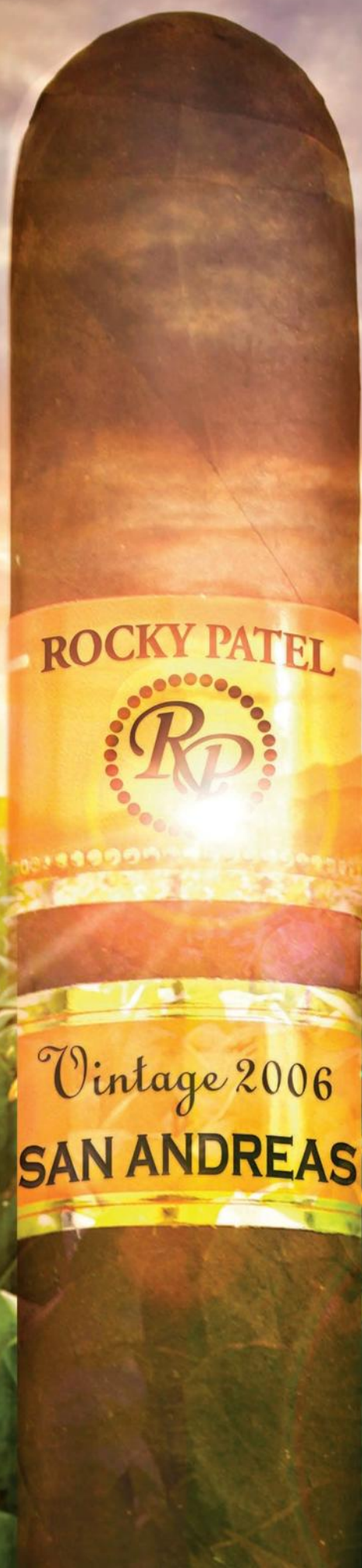
4 ► TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS

Jameis Winston showed he's ready to break out, throwing for 4,090 yards and 28 TDs, which got the Bucs their first winning year since 2010. At 9-7, they lost a playoff spot in a tiebreaker with Detroit. RB Doug Martin will miss the first three games, but the Bucs are banking on him to return and team with Jacquizz Rodgers. Winston's aerial game becomes more explosive with the signing of ex-Redskin WR DeSean Jackson and the drafting of Alabama TE O.J. Howard to join elite WR Mike Evans.



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COMING AUGUST 2017

NFC WEST

Wide receiver Larry Fitzgerald is the reliable veteran of the Arizona Cardinals, but the rival Seattle Seahawks have the edge this season and should repeat as NFC West champions. Expect the Rams to struggle in their second season back in Los Angeles.



1 ► SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

Seattle went 10-5-1 last season and won the NFC West despite a sub-par offensive line. QB Russell Wilson was constantly under pressure and the running game was practically nonexistent. Wilson's 4,219 yards look gaudy on paper, but he threw only 21 TD passes. Christine Michael was released after galloping for a pedestrian 469 yards. Ex-Packer Eddie Lacy (360 yards) replaces him, but Lacy gets a little chubby at times and is coming off ankle surgery, so he may not be capable of resisting the oatmeal-crusted French toast at Portage Bay Café. Seattle does have two quality receivers in Doug Baldwin (94 catches, 1,128 yards) and TE Jimmy Graham (65 receptions, 923 yards). The Legion of Boom welcomes back elite safety Earl Thomas (broken tibia), who looks good enough to intercept any of Kim Jong-un's missiles.

2 ► ARIZONA CARDINALS

The Cardinals were the only team other than the Patriots who fielded a top-10 offense and defense. Injuries contributed to a 7-8-1 campaign. QB Carson Palmer played well over the second half of the year (4,233 yards, 26 TDs, 14 INTs) but needs more playmakers like RB David Johnson, who rushed for 1,239 yards, caught 80 passes for 879 yards and scored 16 TDs. Veteran Larry Fitzgerald had another big year (107 catches, 1,023 yards) but his 9.6 average was a career low. No. 1 draft pick Temple LB Haason Reddick, who can contribute immediately both inside and outside and give a healthy S Honey Badger Mathieu some help, was a smart choice.

3 ► LOS ANGELES RAMS

With no first-round draft choice, rookie Sean McVay, the youngest coach in the league at 31, is already swimming upstream. Jared Goff, who struggled (1,089 yards, 5 TDs, 7 INTs, 54% accuracy) and was benched, needs to start proving he's a franchise quarterback. RB Todd Gurley, the 10th pick in 2015, needs to regain his rookie form after sagging to 3.2 yards per carry. Kenny Britt (68 receptions, 1,002 yards) bolted to Cleveland. Rookie TE Gerald Everett could be Goff's Jordan Reed. Elite defensive coordinator Wade Phillips will love unleashing DE Aaron Donald for his hybrid 3-4 defense, but after four winning seasons in 21 years, the Rams won't be found on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

4 ► SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

Kyle Shanahan and John Lynch were given six years to clean up the mess in San Fran, a once-proud franchise that deteriorated to 15-33 over three years with four coaching changes. Shanahan, an offensive coach, is burdened by player defections and a 32nd-ranked defense. He has a dependable playmaker in RB Carlos Hyde (988 yards), and brought in journeyman QB Brian Hoyer and WR Pierre Garçon. Then he made ex-Raven Kyle Juszczyk, who touched the ball only 104 times in four-years, the highest-paid FB in history with a \$21 million contract. Huh? Draft picks Solomon Thomas and Reuben Foster should help the defense, but 91-year-old Tony Bennett is in better shape than the 49ers.



SUPER BOWL **LII** PREDICTION



Patriots Defeat Giants 31-28

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell will hear it from unforgiving post-Deflategate Patriots fans in September when he finally shows his face in Foxborough when the defending champions unveil the Super Bowl LI banner before the Thursday Night season opener. And now only Eli Manning, the only quarterback who has ever beaten Tom Brady twice in a Super Bowl (XLII and XLVI), could save Goodell from handing the Lombardi Trophy yet again to Brady and Bill Belichick and Robert and Jonathan Kraft as the New York Giants meet the Patriots in Super Bowl LII in Minneapolis on February 4, 2018.

Manning, this time armed with better weapons than David Tyree or Mario Manningham, electrifies the blue army of Giants

fans with touchdown passes to Odell Beckham Jr. and Brandon Marshall, and for the second straight Super Sunday, Brady will find himself in a 28-3 hole. And then, without warning, a fatigued Jason Pierre-Paul and Olivier Vernon will stop hounding Brady, who will hit Rob Gronkowski for one touchdown, Dwayne Allen for another, and Brandin Cooks for a third. The Pats defense will emerge strong as Stephon Gilmore intercepts Manning late to set up a touchdown pass to Julian Edelman with 12 seconds left that gives the Patriots a dramatic 31-28 victory.

For Gisele and Tom, it will be the Joy of Six—six Super Bowl championships.

—Danny Sheridan

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The Deveron
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Don Papa Rum
Douglas Laing
Dove Tail Rum
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Distilling
Elijah Craig
Few Spirits
Four Roses
George Dickel
Glen Grant
Glen Moray

GlenDronach
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America's GAME

Pro football, with its long and storied history, is the most popular sport in the United States

BY KENNETH SHOULER

It was January 1969, with the nation still in the thrall of the Summer of Love. A quarterback with long sideburns, bushy hair and a penchant for wearing white shoes made a brash prediction. Responding to a heckler at a Miami supper club, Joe “Willie” Namath guaranteed victory in Super Bowl III against the Colts, a juggernaut favored by 18 points.

Few gave the Jets a chance, but Namath was more than ready. “We had an advantage because the Colts had this defense that killed the whole NFL that season,” says Namath, now 74, remembering that day more than 50 years ago. “Why would they change for an 18-point underdog? I knew they would stick with the same fronts and coverages and the same blitzes. It was like having all the questions for an exam two weeks before you actually take it. By the time we played, I knew those guys inside-out.”

Namath’s Jets beat the seemingly invincible Colts 16-7 and the football universe would never be the same. “We sent a message to all the underdogs out there,” Namath says. “If you want something bad enough and aren’t afraid to lay it on the line, you can do it. I can’t tell you how many times I have had people tell me they used our win as a motivating force. Teachers, coaches, everyday people. They figured, if the Jets did it, they could do it.”

Moments like that one are the reasons that professional football is entrenched, firmly, as America’s game. Back in 1961, a Gallup Poll showed that people preferred baseball to football by a margin of 34 percent to 21 percent. By 1972, the numbers had flipped: people now favored rectangular warfare to baseball’s subdued charm, and nearly 50 years later, football is more dominant still, more than three times as popular as other sports. “Baseball is what we were,” wrote Mary McGrory, a Pulitzer winning columnist. “Football is what we’ve become.”

Our infatuation with football reveals our desire for speed and violence. Football joins the swiftness of a track meet with the brutality of highway crashes. It juxtaposes the grace of ballet with the ungainliness of clashing bodies in a mosh pit. “The contact, the speed, and the hitting—go back to the Colosseum days when people were fighting to stay alive,” says Namath.

Executing one of his signature jump passes, Joe Namath shocked the world with his New York Jets in Super Bowl III. Games like this one made NFL football America’s favorite sport.

WALTER IOOSS JR./SPORTS ILLUSTRATED/GETTY IMAGES



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Red Grange, football's Babe Ruth. The popular running back drew 36,000 fans to Wrigley Field in his debut game for the Chicago Bears in 1924.

"Football is not a contact sport," Mike Ditka once said. "It's a collision sport." Ray Lewis, in last October's *CIGAR AFICIONADO*, described the intensity he put into one tackle. "Everything that I have been through in life," he said, "I gave to that hit." Our love of football holds up a mirror to ourselves and reveals our bellicose nature. The show is too good to ignore.

Football's timeless images are endless. Johnny Unitas straddled over center, inventing the two-minute drill on the fly, leading his team to a title in '58. Lawrence Taylor standing almost completely upright at his right end position in the '80s and '90s, tossing aside blockers to get to the quarterback. Tom Brady ignoring a seemingly insurmountable 28-3 deficit and leading the Patriots on a record-setting comeback in last season's Super Bowl.

The Early Years

Long before Brady, Unitas, Namath and Taylor, pro football was quite a different game. In 1920, the National Football League (then called the American Professional Football Association) was seeking star power to keep pace with the college game. That year a mere 19 passes were thrown in 40 pro games—about one toss every other game. Rules of the day caused this grounded offense. Passes had to be thrown from five yards behind the line of scrimmage, so defenses were better prepared. An incomplete toss in the end zone cost you possession of the ball. The ball itself was fatter, making it easier to kick than throw. Since two-way players worked 60 minutes on offense and defense combined, they didn't want to run extra pass patterns. It wasn't until decade's end that the pass was becoming a weapon.

The search for a face of the league, a star that the game could hitch its wagon to, was ongoing. Baseball had Babe Ruth. Football lacked anyone of that stature. It appeared that the candidate might be Jim Thorpe, but in that inaugural 1920 season Thorpe was 32. He would play only 52 games with six different teams and didn't finish the decade. But another star was born.

An elusive runner at the University of Illinois, Red Grange had averaged 6.6 yards every time he carried the ball in 1924. His final college game, a 14-9 Illinois victory, drew 85,000 fans at Ohio State. Then he announced he would forego the rest of his education and sign a professional contract. Not a week later he debuted for the Chicago Bears before a throng of 36,000 at Wrigley Field, the largest crowd to date ever to see a professional contest. The Bears anticipated his impact and paid him \$12,000 for his first game.

The gridiron shook. On December 6, 1925, a crowd of 68,000 fans and 100 reporters squeezed into New York's Polo Grounds to watch Grange and the Bears top the Giants 19-7. The star back pocketed \$30,000 in gate receipts. Now the professional game challenged the hegemony of the college game. The fraternity of college coaches were aghast that players such as Grange, who hadn't finished college, would sully their amateur standing by making money off the game. But this was wanton hypocrisy, as they earned generous salaries to coach. In addition, a 400-page study by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, entitled *Bulletin Number Twenty-Three*, revealed that 102 of the 130 colleges visited illegally subsidized their athletes in some form. The report, released in October 1929 and based on four years of

ABOVE: GEORGE RINHART/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

TIMELINE: The NFL Through The Decades

1920s

- Pro football traces its roots back to the 1890s, but it lacked uniform regulations before 1920, when teams from four states formed the American Professional Football Association (APFA). Star Jim Thorpe is named president. The \$100 per team fee is widely ignored.
- The name National Football League is adopted in 1922.

1930s

- The first national broadcast of an NFL game takes place on Thanksgiving Day, 1934, sparking a tradition of having a side of televised football with your turkey dinner. The Chicago Bears beat the Detroit Lions 19-16.
- The second of many rival leagues named the American Football League is formed.

1940s



Don Hutson

- Football helmets become mandatory in 1943. It took 12 more years for facebars.

1950s



- NBC pays \$100,000 for the rights to broadcast the 1955 NFL Championship Game.

- In 1956, the Colts sign Johnny Unitas. He leads Baltimore to victory in the legendary 1958 NFL Championship.

1960s



Vince Lombardi

- The NFL merges with the AFL in 1966. The Packers win the first two Super Bowls.

“There are many things you can learn on the football field. You can learn how to take a good licking and not cry about it, and learn how to hand one out and not brag about it.” —Red Grange

investigations and interviews, revealed that the universities themselves, and booster clubs, gave their athletes cash handouts, tuition waivers and jobs.

So taking money for play was nothing new, and Grange got his. Like Ruth he endorsed, well, anything—candy bars, cigarettes, fountain pens. He was the first football player to appear on a box of Wheaties. Grange was the “Galloping Ghost,” a nickname that only added to his stature as a shadowy figure eluding mere mortals seeking to tackle him. In the hyperbolic reporting of the day, Grange was a mythic figure. “Grange does the work of three men and a horse,” wrote Damon Runyon.

Grange had mediocre professional statistics. But, like Ruth, Grange had the touch of everyman. “There are many things you can learn on the football field,” he once said to children surrounding him, extolling the game’s virtues. “You can learn how to take a good licking and not cry about it, and learn how to hand one out and not brag about it.” Moreover, Grange brought stability to the league. “When I came into pro football in the 1920s, it was really a nothing game. When I played outside of the franchise towns nobody knew anything about pro ball.” But he was wrong in assuming that football lacked a future.

That future would be shorter on mythology but longer on stellar play. Two players would carry the ball—actually and figuratively—into the modern era. They were “The Alabama Antelope” Don Hutson and a sidwinding Washington quarterback, Slingin’ Sammy Baugh. Hutson, who played for Green Bay from 1935 to 1945, was also a defensive back (he intercepted 23 passes in his last four years) and a kicker. He helped Green Bay to three titles—and changed the game from run to pass almost overnight.

In his 11 seasons Hutson led the league in receptions eight times and receiving yardage and touchdowns seven times. The two-time Most Valuable Player caught 99 touchdowns, a record that stood up for 44 years. One of his slick moves was to grab the goal line goalpost and then pivot off of it, away from defenders. Grainy films show Hutson, who ran 100 yards in 9.7 seconds, blazing past backs. “Nobody in the league could touch him,” said

Baugh, claiming that one defender alone couldn’t stop Hutson. While skilled ends are commonly double-teamed now, that tactic was untried until Hutson came along.

In 1942 he might have posted the most dominant season ever. In an 11-game schedule he caught 74 passes for 17 touchdowns and 1,211 yards. Hutson orbited in a galaxy all his own: he scored 138 points, the first NFL player to surpass 100. In 1944 he scored 29 points on four touchdowns and five conversions—in one quarter.

Had he teamed with Baugh he might have shattered even more records. Baugh closed out his rookie campaign in the 1937 NFL Championship Game by slinging three long touchdowns to lead Washington to a 28-21 victory over Chicago. Baugh changed the game from low scoring trench warfare to an aerial assault. “They finally realized that people liked to see scoring,” Baugh recollected. “You don’t want to sit out there in the cold and see a 14-6 game.”

A two-way player, Baugh was a safety who logged 31 interceptions, and a booming punter who still owns the mark for the highest average in a season (51.4 yards in 1940), and a career (45.1 yards). He even snatched a rare “triple crown” in 1943, leading the league in passing, punting and interceptions. He led the NFL in punting for four consecutive years. The Skins’ quarterback played 16 years and made the pass a staple of the game.

The Stars Multiply

The stars were brighter, and more plentiful, in the 1950s. That decade witnessed Unitas and his other half, receiver Raymond Berry, and the great Cleveland Browns, with Otto Graham and Jim Brown, the player who the Giants’ Frank Gifford called “the greatest player of all time.”

For many, Otto Graham is the very embodiment of transcendent records. From 1946 through 1955—four years in the All-America Football Conference and then six more in the NFL—Graham brought the world championship home to Cleveland seven times. When the Browns joined the NFL in 1950, Graham threw four touchdown passes and led Cleveland to a 30-28 win over Los Angeles in the 1950 title game.

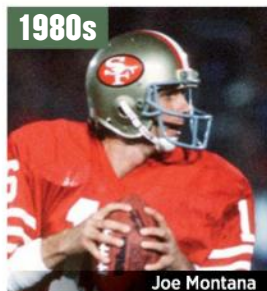
TIMELINE LEFT TO RIGHT: ROBERT WALSH/AP PHOTO; BELOW RIGHT: ROBERT RICE/GETTY IMAGES; FOCUS ON SPORT/GETTY IMAGES

1970s

- On January 14, 1973, the Miami Dolphins become the only NFL team to ever post a perfect season, with 17 wins, including three in postseason. The record still stands.

- In 1977, the league adopts a 16-game regular season. It also outlaws the head slap, an effective but punishing move favored by Deacon Jones.

1980s



- Joe Montana and his San Francisco 49ers are the stars of the decade.

1990s

- The resurgent Dallas Cowboys, built by coach Jimmy Johnson and powered by Troy Aikman, Emmitt Smith and Michael Irvin, win three Super Bowls, including back-to-back victories.

- NFL Sunday Ticket debuts in 1994, allowing satellite viewers to watch the entire slate of NFL games for a fee.

2000s

- Wide receiver Jerry Rice becomes the all-time leader in yards from scrimmage in 2002. He retires in 2005 with 23,540 yards and 208 touchdowns in his career.

- The Steelers defeat the Cardinals 27-23 in Super Bowl XLIII in 2009. They are the only team in NFL history to win six Super Bowls.

2010s



- Tom Brady leads his Patriots in a stunning comeback over the Atlanta Falcons

in February 2016, winning his fifth Super Bowl ring, a record for a quarterback. He ties Charles Haley (who played for the 49ers and Cowboys) with the most rings for any NFL player.

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The Legend— Dick Butkus

The defender is immense, a hulk in a dark blue jersey closing on his prey with unlikely and unnerving speed. He snarls, the number '51' spread across his massive back, and rams his shoulder into his opponent's chest, stopping the man in his tracks and slamming him into the grass. Each and every tackle dished out by legendary linebacker Dick Butkus looked painful as hell.

"My deal was just simply this," says Butkus, his voice deep and gruff. "I was trying to hit them as hard as I could to get them to release the ball."

When you boil pro football down to the basics, it involves big men trying to move other big men out of the way, giants trying to stop other giants using only their bodies as weapons. Few who have played this sport have tackled as well as Butkus. His hits are the stuff of legend, usually high on the body and employed with his arms spread, wrapping up players in a bear hug before driving them into the ground with emphasis, his thick legs pumping all the way.



"Every time he hit you," said his contemporary Deacon Jones, "he tried to put you in the cemetery, not the hospital." Paul Hornung of the Packers called him "the meanest son of a bitch I've ever seen in my life play professional football."

Six foot three and 243 pounds—huge for his time—Butkus played with power and rage for the Chicago Bears from 1965 to 1973 before retiring after his knee was ravaged by injury. The team

struggled, never making the Super Bowl during his career, but he played every down like it was the fourth quarter of the biggest game of the year.

Butkus learned how to hit by being hit. When he played in high school, he played some offense as well as defense, taking the field as a fullback. He soon realized he didn't like being on his back. "If they tackled me high I couldn't use my arms to break my fall," he says. "I thought hmmm. I started hitting that way."

Does it feel good to hit a man so hard? "It does feel good," he says. "It is so hard to get a shot like that. When you do nail him it's like—wow—I got one. The crowd gets jacked up."

He's a member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and today the 74 year old, who enjoys several cigars a week, spends his time hitting golf balls instead of running backs. He smokes big, strong cigars, and he still loves to watch football. He thinks the game today has too many breaks. "I watched a Bears game last year and I counted 62 stoppages in the first half," he says. "I couldn't believe it." But his love of the game and his hometown Bears remains. "It was just a game that I fell in love with. It's fun playing it, it's fun watching it. I was very fortunate to be able to do it."

—David Savona

Before players were heavily recruited, Graham was "discovered" playing intramural football as a freshman. That gives him something in common with his successor as the greatest quarterback of the 1950s—Johnny Unitas. A ninth-round pick of the Pittsburgh Steelers in 1955, Unitas was cut and played semipro ball for \$6 a game while working as a piledriver at a Pittsburgh steel mill. The Colts signed this undrafted underdog as a free agent for \$7,000 in 1956. Two years later, "The Lord of Baltimore" orchestrated the most famous drive in football history. The Colts trailed the Giants 17-14 with 1:58 left in the 1958 title game at Yankee Stadium. Starting from his own 14-yard line, Unitas threw an 11-yard completion to Lenny Moore, then strikes of 25, 15 and 22 yards in succession to Berry, his favorite target. Steve Myhra kicked a 23-yard field goal to put the game in overtime. After a Giants' punt, Unitas completed four passes, and audibled to back Alan Ameche for 22 yards up the middle when he saw Giants' linebacker Sam Huff move to help out on Berry. Finally, a one-yard plunge from Ameche won the contest, 23-17. As twilight turned to dusk in the great three-tiered stadium, Unitas essentially drew the curtain on the two-minute drill, as if it was a new Broadway dance production being seen for the first time.

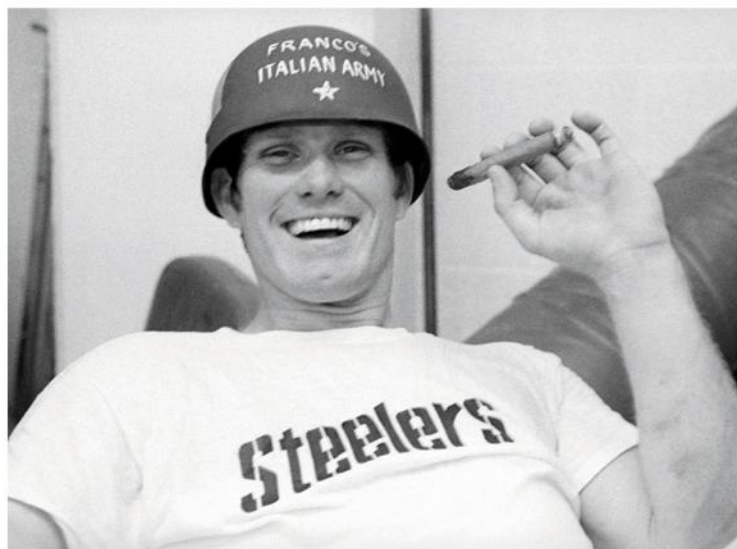
"He was the best play caller I've even seen," recalls Sam Huff, the Giants linebacker. "Unitas to Berry, Unitas to Berry—it drove me crazy. We weren't smart enough to stop that offense." The game was televised and did more than any other to carry the NFL to hitherto unseen heights of popularity. It was the first overtime game in the playoffs and is in the minds of some the greatest game ever played. What cannot be argued is that it was the most important. The legend of the slump shouldered quarterback with the black high tops, and his perfect drive, only grows larger over time.

The 1960s, a decade that unleashed a tsunami of social and

political upheaval across the fruited plain, did the same in football. First came a new league, the American Football League, a league built on a try-anything, high-octane style of offense. The AFL (the fourth league to bear that name) was also a doormat for the National Football League, as evidenced by the first two Super Bowls when the new kids were chastised severely by the smirking establishment, as Green Bay dusted Kansas City and then Oakland by a combined score of 68 to 24. Namath and his Jets changed all that with their improbable Super Bowl victory in 1969, which set off a decade-plus in which the AFC new kids—New York, Kansas City, Miami, Pittsburgh and Oakland—wiped the floor with their NFC competitors, winning 11 of 13 Super Bowls, nine of them by a margin of a touchdown or greater. The merger was on, and so was an annual rite of winter: unholy ass kickings. Only the Cowboys—who won in 1972 and 1978—could stop the bloodletting.

The "Me Generation" 1970s saw crew cuts replaced by facial hair, several dynasties and near-dynasties emerge, and witnessed legendary defensive outfits with nicknames like the "No Name Defense," "The Purple People Eaters," "The Doomsday Defense" and "The Steel Curtain." The decade witnessed the advent of cocaine and steroids, the latter even showing up in players' cereal bowls. One thing remained the same: salaries were routinely lousy, as owners held the puppet strings that players danced on. But above all, it was a decade dominated by one of the greatest outfits ever assembled—the Pittsburgh Steelers.

"I'm going to make them a winner," said a young man with straight blond hair. He was Terry Bradshaw, and he was tall and looked clean, scrubbed and unblemished, like John Voight in *Midnight Cowboy*. His "I wanna go deep" style combined with the steady ground game of Franco Harris and Rocky Bleier, and a reckless defense which seemed to compete with the Oakland



Terry Bradshaw, the golden boy of the Pittsburgh Steelers and one of only two quarterbacks (with Joe Montana) to go a perfect 4-0 in Super Bowls.

Raiders for violent excess and a longing to set ever higher standards for bad taste. The formula for the Steelers isn't hard to grasp. When it was over we knew we had witnessed a decade of football so unlike any other, and the Steelers had four championships.

Football Goes Primetime

"Monday Night Football," which debuted on ABC on September 21, 1970, was a game changer. (It had been turned down by CBS and NBC, which certainly regretted the decision, as the show caught fire instantly.) In the booth were Dandy Don Meredith, the former Dallas quarterback, crooning in his notable twang; Frank Gifford, a Giant on the New York sports scene, literally and figuratively,

whose straight delivery and good looks bumped the female audience, which made up 40 percent of Monday night viewers; and Howard Cosell, the acerbic lawyer turned sportscaster. In a poll of people most hated by Americans, Cosell finished below Richard Nixon but above Satan. Still, the haters who loathed his knowledge and nasal delivery tuned in to hear what he would say and to catch his highlights of the weekend games. These he did, unscripted, in about four minutes. Everyone watched.

A rectangular sport framed by a rectangular screen, football was suddenly must-see television. As Kevin Cook relates in his book *The Last Headbangers*, CBS telecasts featured more cheerleaders, especially the Dallas cheerleaders, who, baring more skin than cheerleaders in other cities, drew some 58 million viewers between the first and second quarters of the 1972 Super Bowl. "I like to give the fans a little sex with their violence," said CBS producer Chuck Milton. Commercials for Noxema had Joe Namath "getting creamed" with shaving cream by Farrah Fawcett.

None of this advertising foreplay would have mattered if the product was lousy. But the revolution that brought changes also brought identifiable dynasties, near-dynasties and savage rivalries. The 1972 Miami Dolphins ran off 17 consecutive wins, the only team to go through a regular season, playoffs and Super Bowl without losing. Pittsburgh and Oakland hated each other and faced off in the playoffs five years in a row. Pittsburgh's defense for the ages included Mean Joe Green, Jack Lambert and Jack Ham, all of whom seemed ready to slay ball carriers without thinking twice.

As Pittsburgh dominated the '70s, so did San Francisco rule the '80s. In 1985, the 49ers faced the Miami Dolphins in Super Bowl XIX. Their combined record was 29-3, then the best ever for two opponents in the big game, and the contest was promoted as a mano-a-mano duel between football's best quarterbacks:

The Warrior— Jason Taylor

When Jason Taylor recalls his 15 years in the National Football League playing in pain—in particular, nearly having a leg amputated—he morphs into a stoic, bottom-line kind of man. "I would do it again," says the 6-6, 255-pounder, who played defensive end for Miami and was the 2006 Defensive Player of the Year. "I loved the intensity, the fierceness, and aggressiveness of the game."

Call it survival mentality. Mental toughness. Resiliency. "Players call it life," he says. "Every day you play football you play in pain. The normal mentality is we learn to push our bodies to our limits, and beyond, to our own demise."

Taylor is on intimate terms with this strange sort of "normal." His injury, suffered in 2008 while he played for the Redskins, was beyond the pale. "I thought I had a bruise in the foot that would go away," he says. Dr. James Andrews told him that his excruciating pain, resulting from nerve damage, was compartment syndrome. Swelling caused by injury can increase pressure inside a compartment—groups of muscle tis-



sue, blood vessels and nerves—and cut off blood flow. The doctor told him he had two hours to get to the hospital, or he could end up with an amputation.

He was playing three weeks later. "I missed three games," he says.

Pain and football are intimate bedfellows. "It's an immense amount of pounding. Like having two car accidents a week," Taylor says, describing football's collisions. "When you are young you are sore on

Monday. Wednesday you are ready to go back to practice. At 35, you are still in pain on Thursday, trying to get pain free and ready to go by game time."

There's no second thought about the path chosen. Taylor's approach to the pain forms no part of his residue of regret. "The years went so fast," he says, now five years removed from the game. "It was long and arduous, but it flew by. I regret not enjoying the process as much as I should have. The process of preparation in March, April, May, the long road trips, the flights back."

At 42, interviewed just a month before he will be inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame, he can look back to a time before he had to worry over the weekly calculus of risk and reward. "I grew up a Dan Marino fan," he says, "and I got to play with him for three years with the Dolphins. It was amazing."

He smokes Padróns, preferring Serie 1926 maduros, and football is still part of his life, with his national radio broadcast for Sunday Night Football with Westwood One. He thinks Tom Brady is the best of all time, and never doubted him, even when he was trailing by 25 in the Super Bowl. "I said to the people around me 'This game is not over.' I watched *The Godfather* enough times to know how the movie ends."

—Kenneth Shouler

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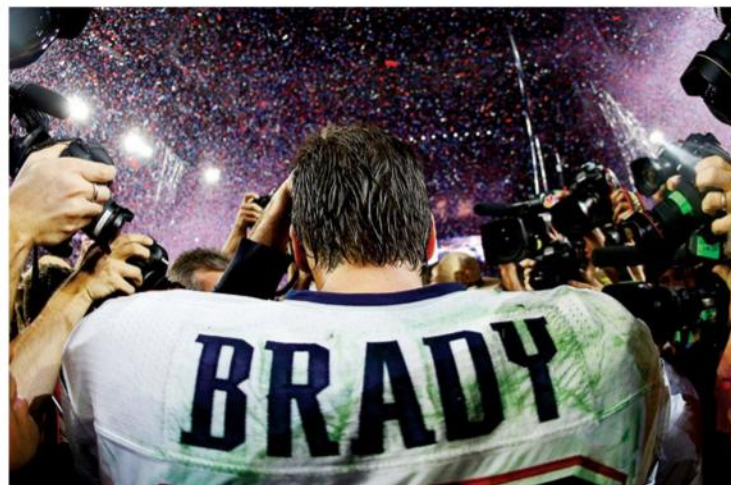
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Dan Marino, just finishing his second year as the first ever to pass for 5,000 yards in a season and the youngest quarterback to start a Super Bowl, and Joe Montana. “Montana always threw it right where he was supposed to,” says San Francisco running back Roger Craig, the first player to get three touchdowns in a Super Bowl. Coach Bill Walsh drew up a plan to attack Miami’s vulnerable inside linebackers, and his six-back-defense held the Dolphins’ ground attack to a pathetic 25 yards. Marino appeared flummoxed and was sacked four times in the second half alone. Finally, Craig hauled in a Montana spiral and was untouched across 16 yards for his third score. “He had great touch,” Craig marvels of Montana. “Like he was handing it to you.” The Niners won in a rout, 38-16. “They called him ‘Joe Cool’ for a reason. He was pretty much unflappable,” says Carl Banks, who won two Super Bowls with the New York Giants and faced off against Montana several times.

The 49ers dynasty was followed by that of the Dallas Cowboys, who ruled the 1990s with their high-powered offense. From a 1-15 record in 1989, they rebuilt into the league’s best team, winning Super Bowls in 1993, 1994 and 1996. New England, run by the Kraft family, coached by Bill Belichick and orchestrated by Tom Brady, has been the dominant team of this century, with five Super Bowl wins between the 2001 season and 2016.

For every champion, there was a loser. Marino never returned to the Super Bowl. Fran Tarkenton and Chuck Foreman took the Minnesota Vikings to three Super Bowls, but never won. In their final Super Bowl together, in 1977, they faced the Raiders. The legendary *Los Angeles Times* columnist Jim Murray might have had the best line: “The Vikings play football like a guy laying carpet. The Raiders play like a guy jumping through a skylight with a machine gun.” Oakland won 32-14. Years later, the Buffalo Bills would make it to four straight Super Bowls only to lose all four.



Tom Brady has five Super Bowl rings, more than any other quarterback, and his most recent one came in a comeback worthy of a Hollywood film.

Today, fans wonder how long can New England rule? Who will their successor be? And who is the greatest ever to play the game?

“Everybody that is a detractor from what Brady and Belichick have achieved is just jealous,” says Dan Hampton, a Hall of Famer who played for the Chicago Bears for 12 years. Hampton thinks that Brady is the greatest quarterback of all-time—better than Montana, better than Unitas, better than them all. His estimate of Belichick is the same. His reasoning? “Brady will not have anyone in the Hall of Fame off of his team,” Hampton says. “True, Randy Moss was there for one year and a cup of coffee, but Noll coached about 10 Hall of Famers and Montana had his share.”

Let the debates continue. That’s football, too. ❖

Ken Shouler is a frequent contributor to CIGAR AFICIONADO magazine.

The Winner— Robert Kraft

Robert Kraft is jubilant, wearing a blue suit and red tie. He moves slowly through the Patriots locker room carrying an open box of Padrón Anniversary Series Imperials, offering each of his players a cigar, a handshake and a hug. His Patriots had just staged the greatest comeback in Super Bowl history, beating the Atlanta Falcons despite trailing by 25 points in the third quarter. Kraft was celebrating in style.

Kraft, 76, began smoking cigars in his late 20s. “I always looked up to successful men who were 20 to 30 years older than I was and often smoked cigars at special occasions. It was part of their persona,” he says. “Now, I only do it on rare occasions—like after winning the Super Bowl.”

Kraft has had a lot of reasons to celebrate. His Patriots have won five Lombardi Trophies since he bought the team in 1994 for \$175 million, at the time a record sum. He took a losing team—the Patriots went 1-15 in 1990, 2-14 in 1992 and had won a meager 19 games over five seasons—and turned



it into a winner. He hired coach Bill Belichick away from the rival New York Jets in 2000, gave him near-complete control over the team, and watched former backup quarterback Tom Brady blossom into one of the best quarterbacks ever to play the game. The Patriots have had only two losing

seasons under Kraft’s reign.

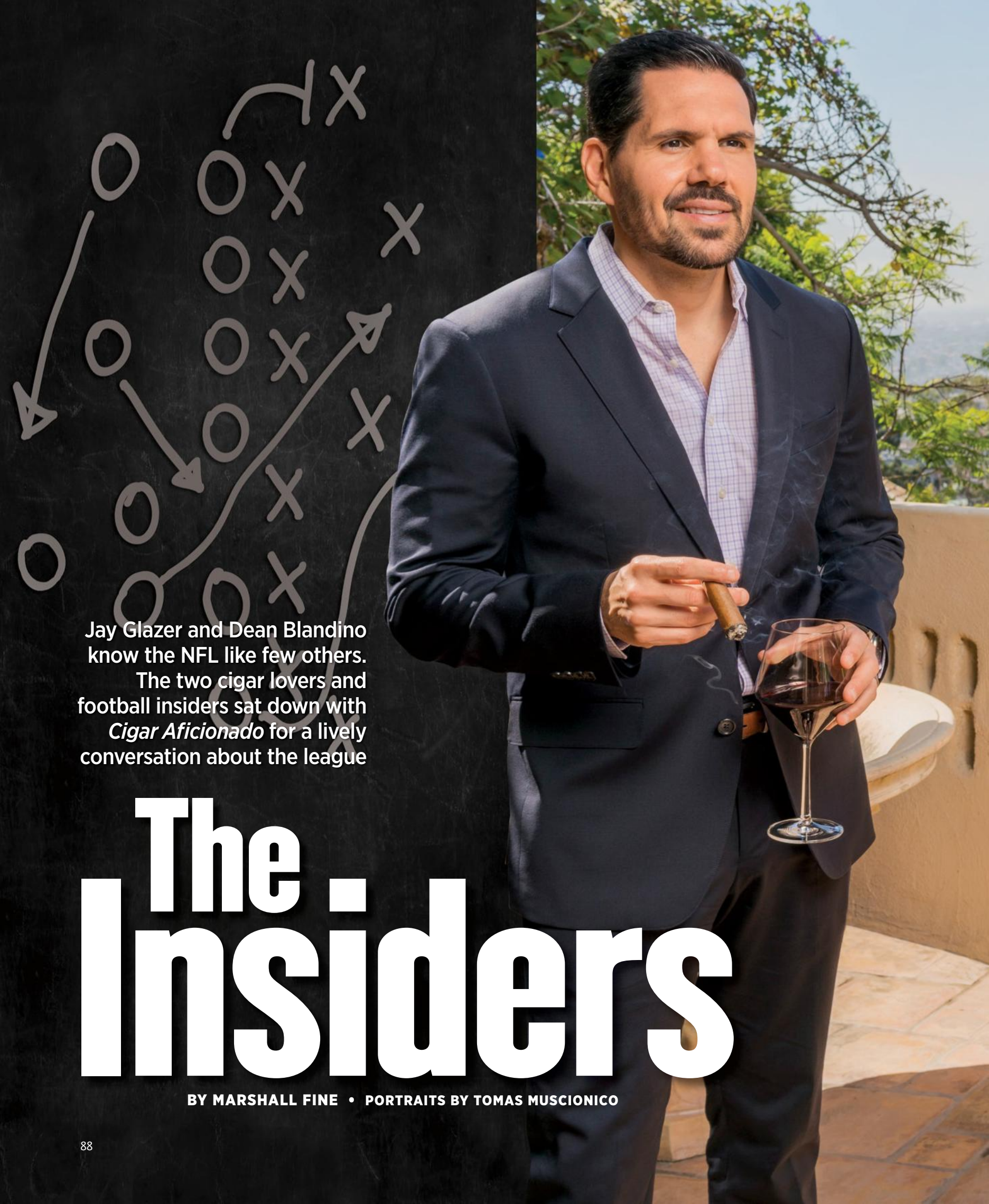
That \$175 million investment, once thought too high, has more than paid off. The team is worth more than \$3 billion today, according to estimates, and *Forbes* estimates Kraft’s net worth at \$5.2 billion. A Harvard MBA who bought his first season tickets to the Patriots in the 1970s, Kraft built his empire with paper and packaging products, starting with Rand-Whitney, then International Forest Products. Today his business holdings are under the umbrella of The Kraft Group, and in addition to the Patriots include the New England Revolution soccer team plus a stake in the UFC, the mixed martial arts sporting organization.

Kraft passes out cigars after each and every Super Bowl win. “We thought it was special to celebrate a victory with very high-quality cigars,” he says, “and the players loved it.”

This last victory was especially poignant. Not only for the record comeback, but because the deck was stacked against his team, with Brady suspended for the first four games of the season and star tight end Rob Gronkowski lost to injury for half the season, plus the entire postseason.

“Every one of them feels good,” says Kraft, “but this one was very special.”

—David Savona



Jay Glazer and Dean Blandino
know the NFL like few others.
The two cigar lovers and
football insiders sat down with
Cigar Aficionado for a lively
conversation about the league

The Insiders

BY MARSHALL FINE • PORTRAITS BY TOMAS MUSCIONICO





Jay Glazer (left) and Dean Blandino, who will dissect NFL games on Fox this season, discussing football trends over cigars and wine at Glazer's home.

“ ‘I’ll share a little juicy scoop with you here,’

Jay Glazer says, a devilish glint in his eye. It’s 9:30 a.m., and he’s already had a cigar. He turns, his shaved dome tilting toward a wary Dean Blandino. “Dean will probably ‘no-comment’ me here. I understand the NFL’s officiating department gave certain officials a virtual-reality camera [for training] on their glasses—and a certain official accidentally left his camera on when he got naked in his hotel room.”

Blandino, who spent 18 years with the NFL, isn’t biting. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

With a satisfied cackle, Glazer says, “That’s why I’m the Insider. It’s a true story. I’m not going to name the guy. I was dying when I heard this.” The powerfully built Glazer won’t let this go. “I think it was Dean,” he says. “Yes or no? Was it you?”

Blandino, who was once the final word on all instant replays reviewed by the NFL, levels his dark eyes on Glazer before rendering judgment. “No,” he says. Then he breaks into a laugh.

The exchange is par for the friendship between Glazer, 47, the scoop-hunting “NFL Insider” for “Fox NFL Sunday,” and Blandino, 45, who resigned earlier this year as the National Football League’s senior vice president for officiating to become an on-air analyst for Fox’s NFL broadcasts. The pair met a few years ago

when Glazer did a story about Blandino’s officiating department. As a practical joke, Glazer showed them a fake version in which he quoted Blandino and colleagues bragging about making officiating calls based on what would most benefit their own fantasy-football teams.

“Everyone else believed it,” Glazer says, still laughing. “Dean was the only one who didn’t fall for it.” [For the record, Blandino notes, the NFL officiating staff is forbidden from participating in the ubiquitous fantasy game.]

Glazer, once a sportswriter for the *New York Post*, parlayed his hustle into both a broadcasting career and as a trainer for pro athletes. Blandino started at the NFL as an intern out of college in 1994 and worked his way up over the next 20 years, developing today’s modern officiating techniques as well as launching the highly successful instant-replay review program. The two are sitting in a back room at Unbreakable Performance Center, which Glazer owns. Outside in the mixed-martial-arts gym, elite clientele (including rapper Wiz Khalifa and Denver Nuggets center Roy Hibbert) are working out in the facility, which sits just above a Pink Taco restaurant on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood.

But in this back room, the voluble Glazer and the more strait-laced Blandino are focused on the future—of the NFL.

Q: What is it that sets professional football apart from other sports for you, personally and professionally?

GLAZER: I think the NFL has become the greatest reality show in America. If you try to script this stuff, you couldn't. Sports, for me, is supposed to be escapism. We're not doctors, we're not saving children. We're in sports: nothing more, nothing less.

BLANDINO: I love the game itself. You have the athleticism, the physicality, the sophistication and some of the intricacies of the strategy. It's a simple game when you break it down: catching, blocking, running, passing. But then there's all this strategy that goes into it, these intricate play calls and everything else. I think it's the best game in the world.

GLAZER: One time, Tiki Barber was showing me his playbook and he said, "Let's see how smart you are, Glaze. I'm just going to have you study these formations." I think there were eight formations to a page and I did three pages. I studied them for an hour and came back the next day. Of the 24 formations, I remembered five. That wasn't the play, that wasn't run or pass—just how they lined up to block. And there's 1,000 formations. He only showed me 24 and I could only remember five. Football is not a game for dummies.

Q: The first Super Bowl was a curiosity. Now it's the biggest sporting event in the United States. What changed in the 50 years that turned it into the annual two-week extravaganza it's become?

BLANDINO: I think the NFL took such big strides in America and became so popular. I always go back to some officiating thing: In the late '70s, the illegal contact rule was put in and it changed the passing game. And the game became more popular in the '80s. Everybody fell in love with it. It's become this brand that the NFL is today. Which is why the Super Bowl is the most-watched TV program every year in the history of American television.

GLAZER: I don't know why we don't have the Monday after the Super Bowl as a national holiday. We should. It's such a nonproductive workday for everyone.

BLANDINO: Except for the league office. It's a very productive day there.

GLAZER: I think dynasties obviously help. The Steelers' dynasty, the 49ers' dynasty, Cowboys, Patriots. People like dynasties. Those really helped the popularity of the league and the Super Bowl.

Q: So the NFL's popularity has grown beyond hometown loyalties?

BLANDINO: When I was growing up in New York, you had Jets and Giants fans. But then you had these large groups of Cowboy fans and Raider fans and Steeler fans. They didn't have a geographical connection to their team. But because in the '70s, the Steelers were so good—with Bradshaw, Stallworth and Lynn Swann and the defenses—and the Cowboys and the Raiders—people identified with that. It became a national obsession, where before it was just regional, where you followed the team in your area.

Q: How does fantasy football affect that?

GLAZER: Fantasy football has really opened things up; people don't just root for their team anymore. They root for players.

BLANDINO: At the officiating level, fantasy football is seen as a conflict of interest. But my brother plays fantasy football and there were people in his league that accused him of colluding with me on calls to help his fantasy team. That's the level of passion and intensity that the fans have.

GLAZER: One time I emceed a fantasy football draft-order party—just to set their draft order. In order to be in this league, you had to have a net worth of over \$1 billion. I asked what they got if they won and they said, "We get a trophy."

BLANDINO: It's gone from a team affiliation to individual players, which is good and bad. For overall popularity, it's good.

GLAZER: My mother and her 78-year-old Jewish friends will call me up and say, "Is Odell Beckham going to play this week?"

"Mom, are you kidding me?"

"Can you call your friend and ask how many carries—?"

"No, I'm not going to call and ask how many carries just so you and your mah-jong friends can have an edge."

Q: Let's talk about the pace of the game. What can be done about the TV timeouts and everything else that seems to lengthen the games for people watching on TV and in person?

BLANDINO: It's a little unreasonable to think you can get a whole football game with all the TV timeouts and everything else into three hours. Last year we were at 3:07.25. I was part of a group that looked at in-game downtime and how we can streamline some of that. You'll see there'll be fewer TV breaks per quarter next year;

there were five per quarter and I think they're going to four. They're also speeding up some of the time between the touchdown and the extra point, the time between the extra point and the kickoff. They want to make a better in-stadium experience and for the fans at home.

Q: It's probably heresy asking this of two guys in television, but are there too many commercials?

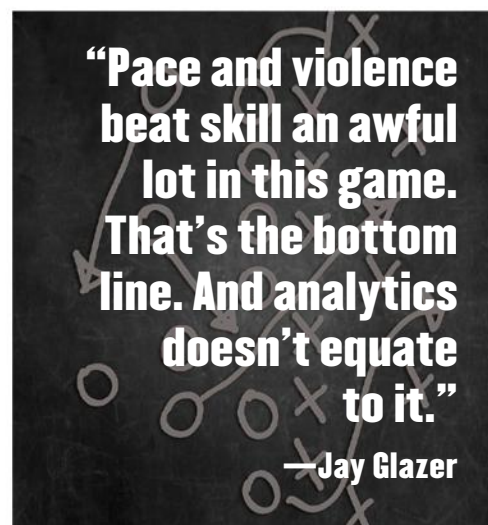
GLAZER: No, no, fuck that. That's how we get paid.

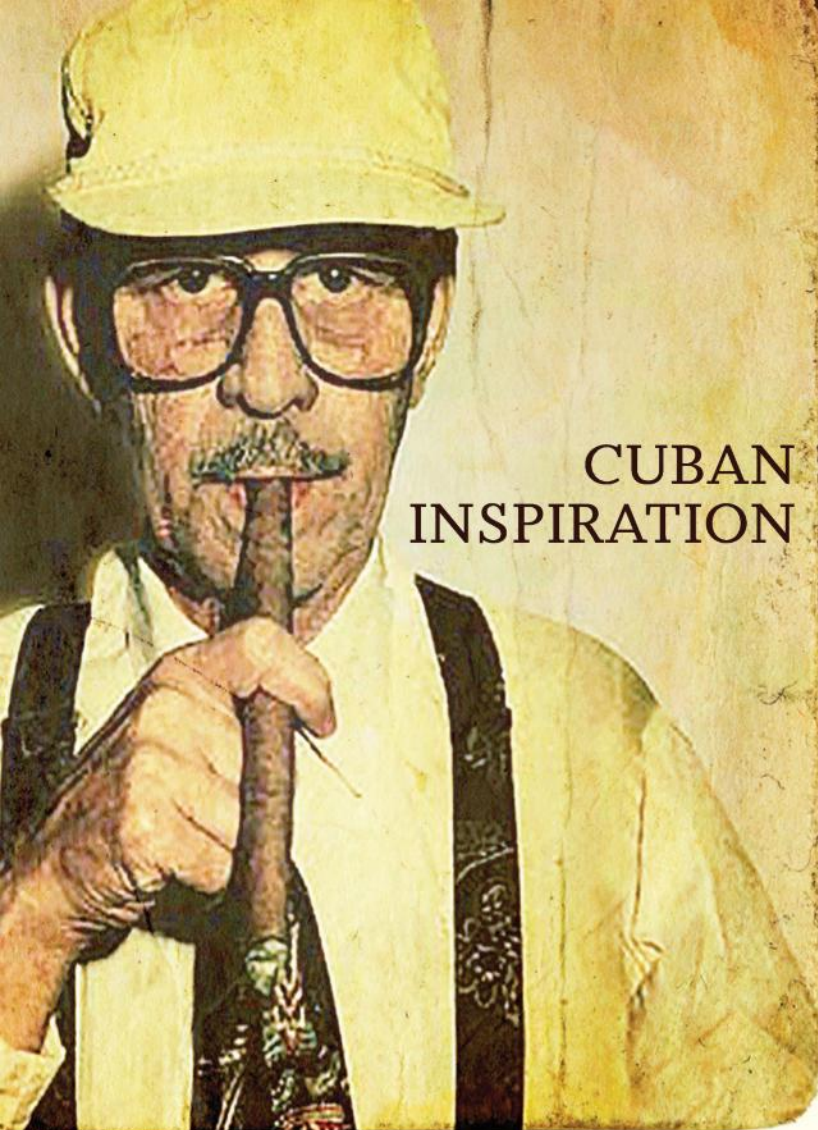
BLANDINO: There's the financial reality that the networks pay a lot of money. But the league is going to look at ways, like a box-in-box thing, where you have the coach talking about the quarterback but you have the ad in another box. They're going to look at more ways to keep fans engaged but also keep the advertisers happy.

Q: Why is the NFL the lowest-paying sport among the major sports—baseball, basketball, even hockey?

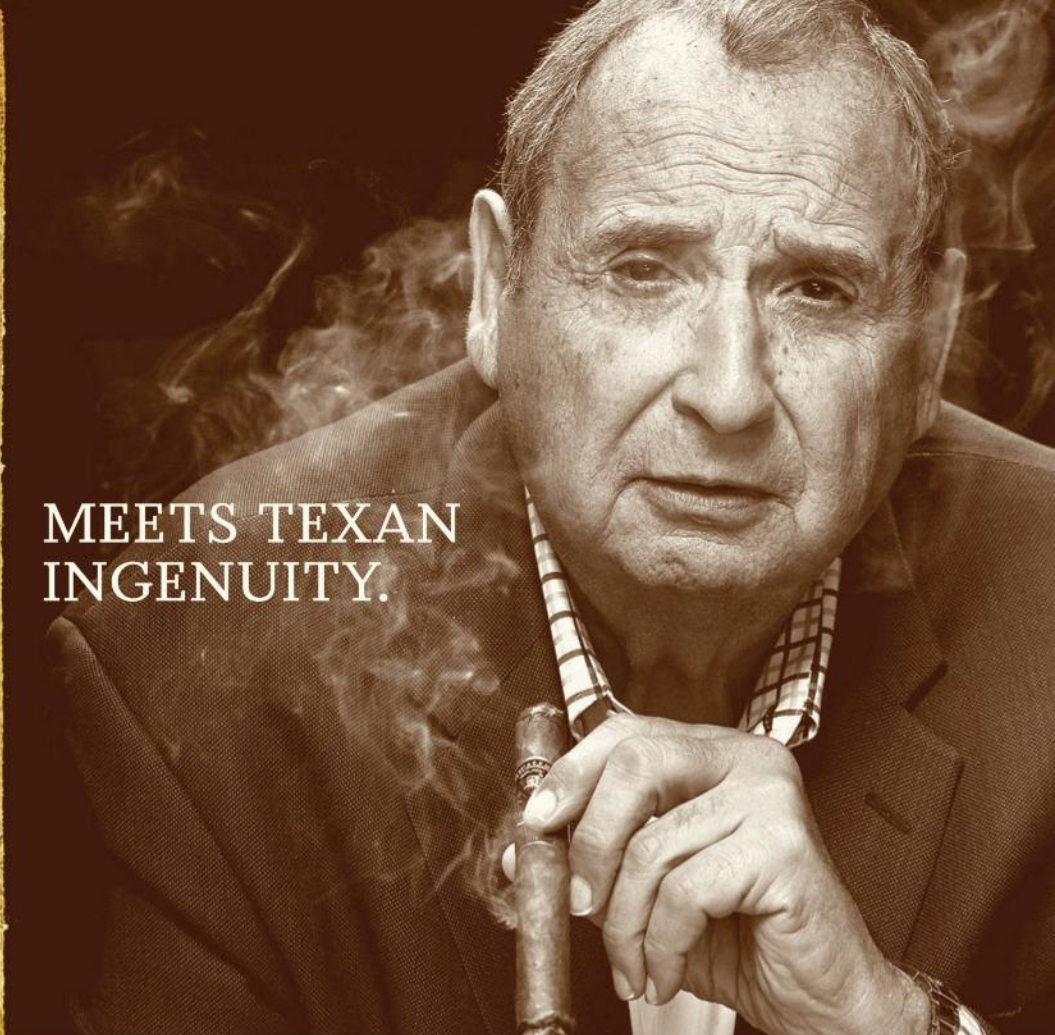
GLAZER: Because they have 53 players on a team.

BLANDINO: There's the salary cap and having more players to pay. You look at basketball and there's 12, maybe 15 guys on the roster—versus 53 [for NFL teams] with the practice squad. There's just more people to pay.





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Q: The last collective-bargaining agreement meant there would be less practice time. What's the impact of that?

BLANDINO: That's something I've talked to a lot of coaches about. It's definitely a point of contention with them; it's supposed to be about protecting these guys and keeping them healthy.

GLAZER: I disagree that less practice time is healthier. I come from a fight background and mentality, where I think you need to spar and drill and drill and drill. The way they have it now, it's like you're maybe sparring once before you go to fight on Sunday. When you're getting ready for a fight, that first week you spar, you want to throw up everyday. You feel horrible. You get the shakes. It's awful. And then the second week, you feel less nauseous, your joints don't hurt as much, your back doesn't hurt as much. Third week, you're ok. Fourth week, you could hit me in the head with a crowbar, I'm good to go. The rest of my body is, too. By not preparing your body for that, I think it leads to more injuries. A lot of people disagree, thinking that, no, we're preventing wear-and-tear during practice. There's got to be a happy medium; you don't just shadowbox for a month and then go fight.

Q: There's been a significant drop in the past 10 years in the number of kids and high school students playing football. Why do you think that is?

GLAZER: Obviously, head trauma. You know, concussions. People are getting scared off by it. A lot more attention and money are going into head trauma with the NFL. They've got to do stuff to make it safer—a million percent. You definitely should have the information going in: You're going to have head trauma and this is what happens. I'm probably the worst guy to ask because I've got a fight background. The job in that sport is to remove you from your consciousness. But no one's complaining about that. In fact, parents are more apt to put their kids in mixed martial arts than football right now. Think about that.

Q: When you have Mike Ditka and Joe Montana saying that they wouldn't let their kids play football, where are the football players of the future going to come from?

BLANDINO: Going back seven or eight years, there was this concern among parents about kids, playing at a young age and potential for head injuries. I think the league's approach was feeding into that a little bit, talking about the amount of concussions and that we had to make the game a little safer. It's shifted to: The science is better; we know more about head injuries. We understand that this is a collision sport, that there are going to be these opportunities for these injuries. The more we know, the more we can diagnose these head injuries and treat them. That will trickle down to the lower levels. I think it will be better for everyone. As for kids playing, you look at Texas, you look at Pennsylvania, you look at Florida, there are still places where the participation in high school football is high.



Glazer and Blandino's top plays in the NFL: The David Tyree helmet catch during Super Bowl XLII, during the Giants game-winning drive, and James Harrison's 100-yard interception return for the Steelers in 2009. Both selected defensive great Lawrence Taylor as their favorite player.

Q: What's the impact of the NFL playing games in London?

BLANDINO: Certainly it impacts teams when they have to go to London. You look at the time difference, the distance they're traveling. Football teams and coaches are creatures of habit and that does take them out of their routine. But teams are going over once a year, twice a year at the most. The biggest challenge to growing the game internationally is that it's hard to grow the game when it's not happening at a grassroots level. It's hard for them to identify with American football because you don't have people in Europe and places outside America who are playing the game from a young age. I've been to the London games; I still feel it's more of a novelty right now versus really making inroads.

GLAZER: Business-wise it's smart because obviously, global expansion, you want to try and do that. With the Raiders going to Las Vegas, it's a great way for them to get more international attention.

Think of all the people coming to Vegas from all over the world, high rollers who will get exposed to the NFL. The Raiders' global marketing? Oh my gosh, that's going to go through the ceiling.

Q: That brings up the whole issue of franchise mobility, with the Raiders as Exhibit A. What does it do to the fan base when a team says, 'If you don't cough up for a new stadium, we're going to leave'?

GLAZER: I feel bad every time a city loses a team. No doubt. I feel terrible for them. Fans get caught up in big business and it is still a business. But I feel terrible for those fans.

Q: Technologically, what are you doing now that you couldn't have imagined five years ago, and what's the next step in terms of how we watch football on TV?

BLANDINO: From my perspective, you look at how the game is produced and instant replay and what that's meant to the game. It's become such an integral part of the game. With high-definition and multiple angles and now these 360-degree views, where you can see a play from one perspective and they can rotate it around so you can see what's happening on every side of the play, that's been a tremendous benefit, not only to us in officiating but it's made it more entertaining for the fans. Technology never ceases. The quality is going to get better.

Q: What's the next big technological advance in the way TV presents football?

BLANDINO: I think VR.

GLAZER: Oh yeah, virtual reality. Oh my God, we did one at Fox. They put the virtual-reality goggles on us and we were inside the Pro Bowl locker room. Guys were walking past you and you were getting out of the way so you didn't bump into Russell Wilson. It's unbelievable.

BLANDINO: That's technology that will take people where they've never been before.

GLAZER: Right in the middle of the field. It's crazy. I know Fox is working on it.

Q: Will we be able to watch a game at home in real-time VR?

BLANDINO: I don't know if they're there yet. What teams are doing is, you stand in an official position or the quarterback's place and put on the goggles. You can read the defense or you can see what the receivers are doing. It's like you're there. That's the next step in how we immerse our fans in this game. We're already doing it.

Q: What about the kind of analytics they use in baseball, like in *Moneyball*?

GLAZER: I don't think that works at this level, because *Moneyball* is just stats. It doesn't equate for violence. It doesn't equate for pace. Pace and violence, in my opinion, beat skill an awful lot in this game. The league doesn't like the word 'violence,' but it's still

a violent game. You're still fighting someone out there. That's the bottom line. And analytics doesn't equate to it. You can't just interchange people because this shortstop has more walks. It doesn't work.

BLANDINO: The league has these tracking devices on the players and it tracks distance, speed, all of these things. They have all of this data but the teams are trying to figure out: What can we do with it? Information is great, but is this really going to make us better?

GLAZER: That's exactly what I'm saying about this being an inexact science. Certain teams will use those trackers and say, "OK, they can only take X amount of steps. And then they max out on their 100 percent." And another team will say, "We want to see what their max is so we can push the breaking point past that, so they can go further." That's two different ends of the spectrum. Information is power, but it's how you use that information.

Q: At this point, there is a year-round news cycle about the NFL. The Combine and the Draft are now huge media and public events. How did that happen?

BLANDINO: The NFL has smart marketing people. They basically said, "Let's take each month in the off-season and create an event and let's make that the NFL event." You have the Combine in February and then you have free agency in March and then you have the Draft in April. Then there are minicamps and other things as you build up to training camp. So it isn't that the Super

Bowl ends and we don't start talking football again until August or September.

Q: How did Deflategate hurt the league?

GLAZER: I hate that word. Not everything needs to be a congressional hearing. It needs to go back to, Hey, they did it—knock it off. It just added to the reality show. But oh my God, I hate that word so much.

BLANDINO: It was definitely an interesting exercise. The league won some battles, and the Patriots won some battles—

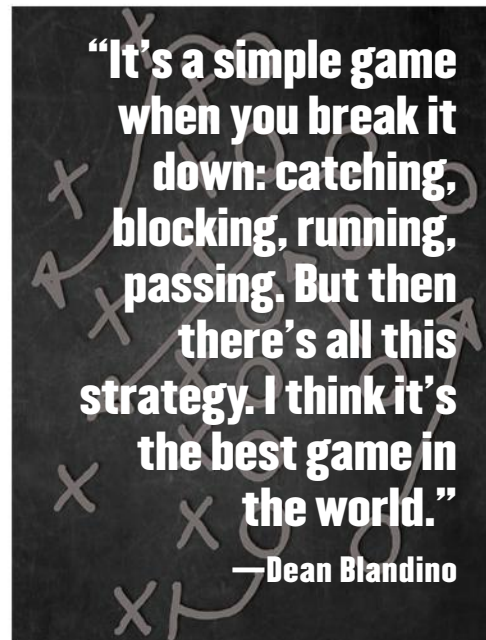
GLAZER: The Patriots won the ultimate battle.

BLANDINO: Ultimately it wasn't great for that to drag on so long. It just wasn't a positive for the league. But hindsight is 20/20.

Q: What's the best play you've ever seen?

GLAZER: Probably the David Tyree play with Eli Manning in the Super Bowl against the Patriots in 2011. Nothing of that made sense—it just shouldn't have happened.

BLANDINO: James Harrison's interception return against the Cardinals in the Super Bowl when he went 100 yards. And Larry Fitzgerald—with James Harrison, it was unbelievable for a guy that big to go 100 yards. But watching Larry Fitzgerald not give up on that play and actually have to run in the bench area, around people to tackle him at the goal line and make it so close that we in replay couldn't tell if he broke the plane of the goal line or not—that one stands out for me.



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INSIDE THE NFL

WHO WILL WIN THE SUPER BOWL?

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HOW TO BEAT THE BOOKMAKERS
JAY GLAZER AND DEAN BLANDINO—
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Q: Who's your favorite all-time player?

GLAZER: For me, it's Lawrence Taylor. Lawrence is different. If a Martian walked in the room and there were a million people here and Lawrence was in that room, he would know something's different about Lawrence.

BLANDINO: For me, it was Lawrence Taylor, too. He was the guy who changed the game. He changed the way offenses blocked.

GLAZER: They would have four different game plans to stop him and he would beat all four. And there was a good chance he was out at a club two hours earlier.

Q: Which team will surprise everybody this season?

GLAZER: The Patriots won't surprise anybody.

BLANDINO: I like the Titans.

GLAZER: I think the Rams have a shot at going above .500.

BLANDINO: You take the Rams. I'll take the Titans.

Q: And who's going to be in the Super Bowl?

GLAZER: Patriots and Packers. The Patriots went through the off-season as if they went 0-16 last year. They attacked this off-season like they'd never won a thing. That's part of their brilliance. The Packers were really banged up last year at every skill position. They have a healthy Aaron Rogers and they're going to get healthier.

BLANDINO: I can't pick the same ones. But it's tough to pick against the Patriots. The dream scenario would be the Cowboys and the Patriots.

Q: Are the Cowboys still America's team?

GLAZER: Yes. Ratings-wise, when we have them on, it's ridiculous.

BLANDINO: The Cowboys, whether they are 10-2 or 2-10, they draw the most audience.

Q: You both enjoy cigars. What are your favorites?

GLAZER: Montecristo No. 2s and Cohibas.

BLANDINO: Cuban Cohibas.

Q: Describe your personal favorite football moment.

GLAZER: Our show, "Fox NFL Sunday," we're family. That's how close we all are. Howie Long—that's my brother. To sit there with him the moment he realized his son [Chris, a Patriots' defensive end] just won a Super Bowl—I feel like I'm going to start crying right now. He started going, "Oh my God! Oh my God!" It wasn't tough-guy Howie Long anymore or Hall-of-Famer Howie Long anymore. It was a father. It was one of the most special things I've ever seen in my life. You can hear how choked up I'm getting talking about it. That's what football does. I'm so blessed to be around that.

BLANDINO: For me, the power of the NFL and the power of football is when my dad was dying from cancer. He didn't have



Glazer and Blandino got to know one another when Blandino was working for the NFL as the league's senior vice president of officiating, and Glazer played a practical joke. The two have been friends ever since, and share an appreciation of handmade cigars.

long to go and he was in the hospital, on a lot of pain medication. We grew up Giants fans in New York and it was the Patriots-Giants Super Bowl at the end of the 2011 season. He stopped the nurse: "I don't want to take any medication. I just want to be able to watch the game and not be in this hazy state." That was so meaningful to him. And the last sporting event he watched was the Giants winning the Super Bowl in this amazing game. He passed away a month later. Just thinking about what it meant to him, that's what football and the NFL is all about. ❖

Contributing editor Marshall Fine is critic-in-residence at The Picture House Regional Film Center in Pelham, NY.



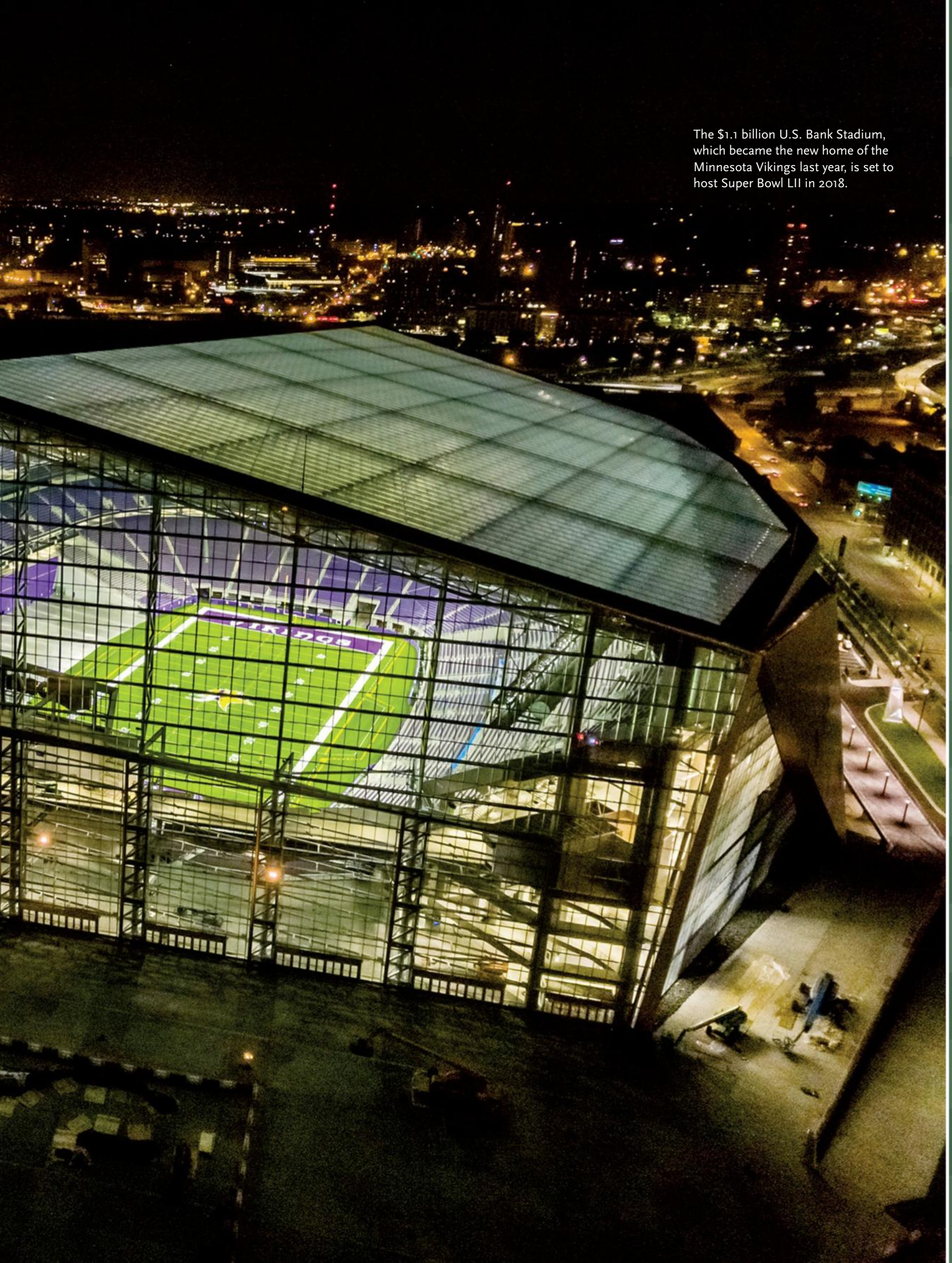
usbank
stadium

Super Stadiums

The biggest trend in NFL football is for splendid new venues that shout out for Super Bowl consideration **BY BLAKE DROESCH**

ABOVE LEFT: COREY GAFFER; RIGHT: MARK GOODMAN

The \$1.1 billion U.S. Bank Stadium, which became the new home of the Minnesota Vikings last year, is set to host Super Bowl LII in 2018.



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ESCAPE TO PARADISE

SAN CRISTOBAL

Kickoff is looming. The Minnesota Vikings prepare to take the field at U.S. Bank Stadium, the \$1 billion palatial wonder that opened last year in downtown Minneapolis. With its colossal transparent ceiling and 95-foot swinging glass doors, the luminous stadium is a testament to both the storied franchise and the grandiosity of America's most beloved game.

The Vikings exit the locker room, pacing the walkway of the Delta Sky360 Club through a sea of screaming purple-clad fans, who are so close they can feel the intensity—the pregame tension brimming to the surface. Some fans reach out to fist-bump the players, but most simply look on in awe, reveling in their proximity to the Nordic warriors at such a crucial moment.

The Vikings take the field—and so do you. Your Turf Club Suite sits 25 feet from the playing field, among the closest seats in all of the NFL. The opulent club suite, located adjacent to the home team bench, offers all the luxuries a football fan could ask for: an inclusive food and beverage menu, three large HD televisions and the conveniences of a full-service concierge staff. After the game, you will receive unprecedented access to postgame interviews with the players and coaching staff through a glass partition in the Sky360 Club.

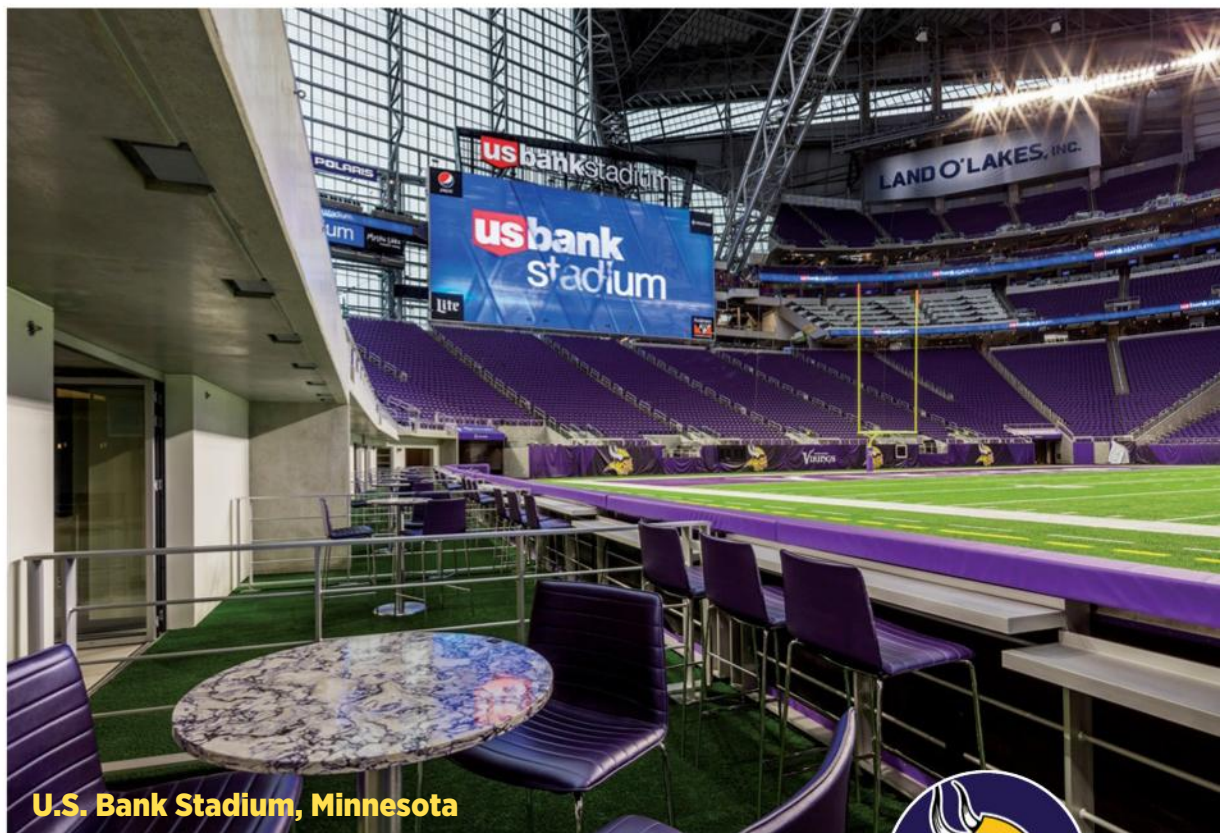
U.S. Bank is only the most recent example in the proliferation of the NFL's super stadiums—billion-dollar architectural marvels constructed to serve as the grandest stages in sports and entertainment. Innovative in both design and function, these futuristic coliseums are using advanced technologies and progressive business strategies to recreate the 21st-century fan experience.

Most would trace the phenomenon back to Arlington, Texas, where, in 2009, Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones built his behemoth AT&T Stadium. The first NFL stadium to exceed \$1 billion in construction costs, the home of the Cowboys wowed spectators with its sheer size and a 60-yard television monitor that at the time was the largest HDTV in the world. In 2011, just two years after AT&T opened, the stadium hosted Super Bowl XLV. Cities and franchises across the country are now keen on adopting the Jones doctrine: If you build it, the Super Bowl will come.

From 1995 to 2005, 16 NFL stadiums opened, but only three—Tampa Bay's Raymond James Stadium, Detroit's Ford Field and Houston's NRG Stadium—hosted the Super Bowl within four years of their inaugural seasons. Just six NFL

stadiums opened between 2006 to 2017, yet all of them won bids to host Super Bowls within the same amount of time. Minnesota will host Super Bowl LII this season with Atlanta, Miami and Los Angeles following in 2019, 2020 and 2022, respectively.

“We think we’ve created some staggeringly beautiful buildings, but the real selling point is fan experience and revenue,” says Bryan Trubey, executive VP and director of sports and entertainment for HKS Architects, the design firm behind the AT&T and U.S. Bank stadiums as well as a venue currently in development



U.S. Bank Stadium, Minnesota

U.S. Bank Stadium's premium offerings include the luxurious Turf Club Suites, which put fans 25 feet from the playing field, among the closest seats in all of the NFL.



in Los Angeles. “The sports business is one of the last frontiers as architects, and we’ve learned to approach buildings as a consumer design business, which has led to spending significantly more time developing every aspect of the building’s interior and exterior.”

U.S. Bank's Turf Suites and the Delta Sky360 experience were the brainchildren of HKS. In designing AT&T Stadium and the Indianapolis Colts' Lucas Oil Stadium, the company became the first architects to place premium seats going down to the front row. HKS has a proven track record for avant-garde design, but it's the value proposition that brings in business. Its design proposals are supported with market research and place a high stake on premium seating and sponsorship placements, ensuring long-term value.

Revenue-focused proposals allow previously unheard of investments by franchises and municipalities, which in turn gives the architects more freedom to innovate, making NFL stadiums some of the most prestigious large-scale designs in the nation today.

U.S. Bank Stadium

Minnesota Vikings

Opened: 2016

Hosting Super Bowl LII in 2018

Estimated Cost: \$1.1 billion

Call it fate or a message from the Norse gods, but when the roof of Minnesota's Metrodome collapsed beneath 17 inches of snow pack in December of 2010, causing \$22 million in damages, it was an affirmation of two things: downtown Minneapolis was in desperate need of a new football stadium—and a dome wasn't the way to go.

Given Minnesota's frigid climate, an expensive retractable roof wouldn't have made a worthwhile investment. That forced the franchise to find an innovative (but hard to pronounce) solution: ethylene tetrafluoroethylene.

ETFE, as it is more commonly known, is a lightweight, but durable, clear plastic. Developed for aeronautics, it became popular as a roofing material. It now covers Germany's Allianz soccer arena and the "water cube" at the Olympics facility in Beijing. The U.S. Bank Stadium marked the debut of an ETFE roof as part of a sports complex in the United States, and its extensive use (248,000 square feet) makes it the largest of its kind in the world. The material's transparency provides ample light inside the stadium, while layers of foil in each panel reduce the greenhouse effect on warm afternoons.

But it was snow, not heat, that brought the previous stadium down. To prevent accumulation the roof was constructed at an angle, which gives the stadium exterior a unique esthetic. Some have even speculated that the slanted ceiling serves a strategic purpose, as the acute angle of the roof lies above the visiting sideline and directs much of the noise from the stadium at the Viking's opponents.

Transparent ETFE lets in so much natural light that the Vikings recommend bringing sunglasses to afternoon games. Complement that with five of the largest glass doors in the world to open during warm-weather games, and the indoor stadium suddenly has an outdoor vibe.

Premium seating is a hot commodity nowadays and U.S. Bank's offerings are comprehensive, with options at virtually any angle. Want red zone action? Go for the Touchdown Suites by the

east end zone. Prefer the all-encompassing view at midfield? The Norseman and Norseman Lounge Suites run between the 20-yard lines on the first level of the stadium. And if you simply want to get as close to the action as possible, the Turf Suites put you right on the field, mere feet from the Viking's bench.

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Atlanta Falcons

Opening: 2017

Hosting Super Bowl LIII in 2019

Estimated Cost: \$1.6 billion

Just as football players are commonly described as modern gladiators, stadiums are often compared to ancient coliseums. But in designing the new Mercedes-Benz Stadium in downtown Atlanta, HOK architects drew inspiration from a different Roman relic: the oculus, or circular opening, in the dome of the Pantheon.

Eight ETFE panels in the shape of falcon wings expand and retract inside of the oculus like a camera's aperture in less than 12 minutes.

The oculus as the centerpiece of the design creates a novel appearance for both the interior and exterior—a design requirement for the Falcons. "We were not in the business of building a better Georgia Dome," says Falcons CEO and president Rich McKay, alluding to the former home of Atlanta football. "We wanted to change the game in design and fan experience."

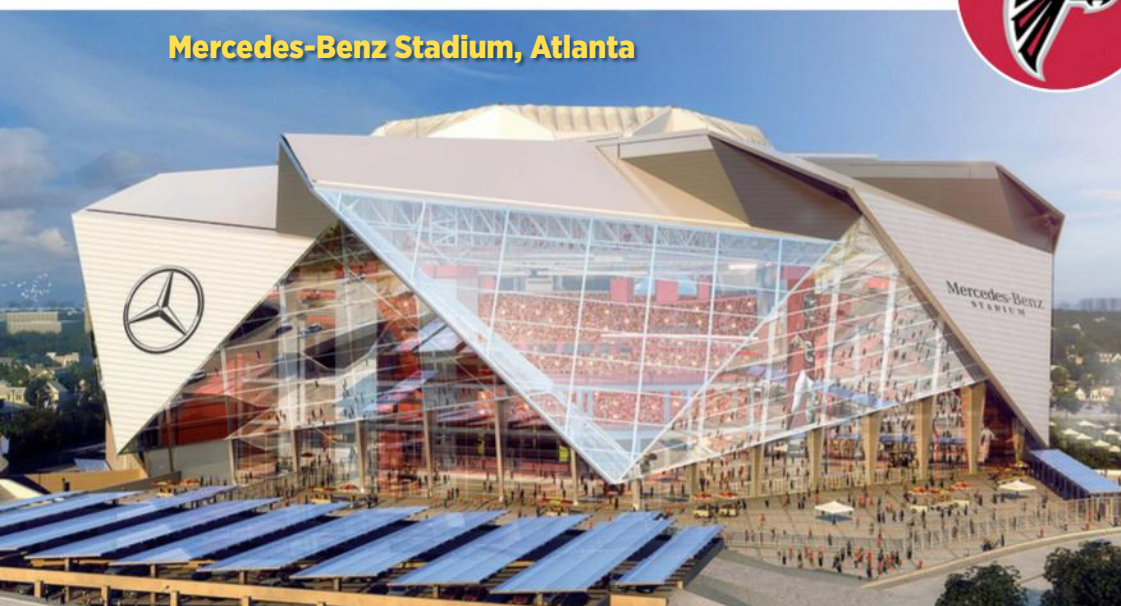
Beneath the oculus lies a circular LED screen that the Falcons are calling a "halo display." It stands 58 feet tall and measures 1,075 feet around, three times larger than any display in professional football. "If you laid the screen flat and stood it up, it would be taller than any skyscraper in downtown Atlanta," says McKay.

But the franchise wanted more than a majestic edifice that would look good on TV. The interior design had to be focused on optimizing the stadium experience. "Anything we do starts with talking to our fans and conducting research based on their suggestions," says Mike Gomes, the Falcons' senior VP of fan experience.

A council of 1,000 fans provide feedback on all aspects of the stadium, from food, to the lines at the bathroom and gate giveaways. "We made the seats bigger, made it possible to circumnavigate the building no matter what type of ticket you had," says McKay. But, as any experienced spectator may have guessed, one overwhelming concern dominated fan suggestions: the price of concessions. In a move that has drawn just as much attention as the building itself, Mercedes-Benz Stadium has announced it will be offering the lowest food and drink prices in all of sports: \$2 hot dogs, \$3 peanuts, \$5 beers, and \$2 soft drinks with free, self-service refills that will add

Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium drew inspiration from Rome's Pantheon with its oculus roof, but fan comments were just as important to the process.

Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Atlanta



value and shorten concession lines. A “whole-dollar” pricing policy will make transactions easier and more efficient.

Atlanta is also making it a priority to get fans as close to the action as possible. Premium seats at the 40-yard line on the first level have access to nearly 60 yards of the sideline behind each bench. Those fans can walk directly onto the sidelines and into a special club area beneath their seats.

The franchise has made a conscious effort to reduce the number of media and team affiliates standing behind the goal posts in order to reduce obstructed views for the 16 end-zone suites. Loge Suites are located in each corner of the field where the end zone meets the sideline, as well as traditional boxes on the 200 and 300 levels.

The fans weren’t the only consultants for the Falcons’ new stadium. Atlanta sought advice from the NFL several times throughout the design process to ensure Mercedes-Benz Stadium could accommodate the biggest game in sports. “The stadium was constructed entirely for mega events like the Super Bowl,” says Gomes, citing field and seating flexibility and broadcast capabilities that have been “tricked out to the nines.” But if you were to ask of the Atlanta Falcons what was the one key to building a Super Bowl–location-caliber stadium, they would offer a simple answer:

“The most basic but important factor was the placement of the stadium in the heart of Atlanta,” says Gomes, remarking that more space for far less money was available on the outskirts of town. But the Falcons’ owner Arthur Blank remained adamant on keeping the stadium close to the city’s tourism areas, including its 10,000 hotel rooms and Hartsfield–Jackson Atlanta International Airport, which is the busiest airport in the world. Atlanta’s population rose to nearly 5.8 million last year—among the fastest-growing cities in the country—and the franchise is already looking to the future.

“We don’t want to host a Super Bowl,” says Rich McKay. “We want to host Super Bowls.”

Hard Rock Stadium

Miami Dolphins

Renovation: 2015-2018

Hosting Super Bowl LIV in 2020

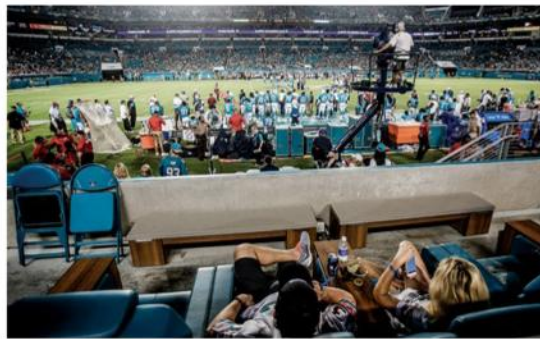
Estimated Cost of Renovation: \$500 million

Joe Robbie Stadium was the dated home of the Miami Dolphins since the late 1980s. But thanks to a half-a-billion-dollar, multiyear renovation, Hard Rock Stadium—as it is now known—bears no resemblance to its past iterations.

At the center of it all is a massive 626,000-square-foot canopy that was installed before the start of the 2016 season. The covering, composed of ETFE and 17,000 tons of steel, puts more than 90 percent of Hard Rock Stadium’s seats in the shade—and away from the relentless south Florida sun. The covered areas can enjoy



Hard Rock Stadium, Miami



Miami’s Hard Rock Stadium maximizes seating in the shade. The 72 Club (lower left) provides cushy comfort and gourmet dining options (lower right).



temperatures that are reduced by an incredible 20 to 30 degrees.

In 2020, the Miami area will host the Super Bowl for a record-breaking 11th time. But without the vision of Dolphins owner Stephen Ross, who has privately funded the modernization of Hard Rock Stadium, such a feat would have never been possible.

“The league said Miami won’t get another Super Bowl without the redesign,” says Ross, a real-estate developer responsible for such major projects as New York City’s Time Warner Center and the ongoing Hudson Yards Redevelopment Project. He was determined to not only make a new home for the Miami Dolphins and University of Miami Hurricanes, but to bring a world-renowned entertainment center to south Florida.

In July, Hard Rock Stadium hosted the internationally recognized El Clasico rivalry soccer game between Real Madrid and FC Barcelona. Ross has also made public his desire to bring the Miami Open tennis tournament to the stadium. The venue also has the flexibility to host festivals, premier music tours and—of course—the big game itself.

“They don’t pay us anything to host a Super Bowl,” says Ross, speaking on the importance of having an event space like this in Miami. “But it’s an economic boost for the area and it benefits the city as a whole, so you do it as a citizen.”

This season, renovations to suites and premium seating doubled Hard Rock’s unique offerings from eight to 16. The number of seats overall for regular season games fell from 76,000 to 65,000, but now the stands are as close as 56 feet from the field in a stadium that once had some of the most distant vantages in the NFL.

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L.A. Stadium

L.A. Stadium, opening in 2021 with a performance center, retail space and residences, will be like a city within a city.

The landscaping on the stadium grounds has also been thoroughly redesigned. “When you approach the stadium it’s going to feel like you’re walking into a five-star resort,” says Ross.

The new 72 Club contains nearly 600 double-padded lounge seats that would fit into a living room decor. Fans with access to the 72 Club can walk on the sideline at any time to reach private club access that comes with the ticket. Seating experiences are similar for fans with tickets in the field clubs (Ford Field Club and Atos Field Club Presented by EMC²), which offer an incredible perspective in the front row behind the end zone.

“It used to be you had a lower deck, club seats and an upper deck. Today people are more sophisticated, so we’re appealing to them with a more diversified offering,” says Ross, adding that there’s now more space for standing areas, concessions concourses and clubs. “People aren’t just looking to go to a game anymore. They’re looking to go to an experience that includes a game.”

L.A. Stadium

Los Angeles Rams & Chargers

Opening: 2021

Hosting Super Bowl LVI in 2022

Estimated Cost Upon Completion: \$2.6 billion

After decades without an NFL team, Los Angeles now has two. In 2016 the Rams returned after 21 years in St. Louis. This year, the former San Diego Chargers headed back to the city that spawned them. And the stadium that will soon serve them may be the largest spectacle in all of pro sports.

A 70,000-seat football stadium, a 6,000-seat performance center, 1.5 million square feet of office and retail space, 300 hotel rooms and 2,500 residences means L.A. isn’t just building a football arena, it’s building a city within a city.

“The pattern you’ve seen with our venues will be progressive—from Lucas Oil, AT&T and U.S. Bank to L.A.,” says HKS Architects executive Bryan Trubey. Many of the details of the stadium are still unknown, but something big is happening.

HKS is again tapping ETFE, this time for an 18-acre, wave-like canopy over the stadium. The sides of the building will be open, creating a feeling very similar to what HKS has done in Minnesota, while taking advantage of the climate in Southern California.

The new stadium was originally intended to open in 2019 and host the Super Bowl in 2021. But record rainfall in the southern California area this year forced a construction delay.

Many predict the city’s bid for the 2024 Summer Olympics to be a sure thing, making a multiuse venue more crucial than ever. And from the looks of it, there isn’t an event in the world too large for this future crown jewel of Los Angeles.

Las Vegas Stadium

Las Vegas Raiders

Opening: 2020

Estimated Cost Upon Completion: \$1.9 billion

When the Oakland Raiders move to Sin City for the 2020 season they will set up shop in Paradise, Nevada, closely neighboring the Las Vegas Strip. Little is known about the stadium, but renderings released by MANICA Architecture show a transparent roof covering a horseshoe-shaped venue that opens to views of the Strip. The “glass-domed roof,” as they are calling it, will be accompanied by large operable walls at the side of the venue, similar to the design of the U.S. Bank Stadium. The Vegas stadium is designed to fit 65,000, and the proposal says it can be expanded to 72,000. Nothing is official yet, but given the city’s access to entertainment and hotels, the odds of a Sin City Super Bowl seem pretty good. ❖



Details are scant for Las Vegas Stadium, soon to be the Raiders’ home, but expect a glass dome roof.



Las Vegas Stadium

The background of the page is a photograph of a large, modern sportsbook. The ceiling is a complex, dark metal truss structure. On the left, several NFL team logos are displayed on the wall. In the foreground, there's a bar area with people. In the background, rows of betting stations with multiple screens showing various sports events are visible. The overall atmosphere is dark and industrial.

Danny Sheridan's
Secrets for

Betting^{the} NFL

Simple strategies
from the legendary
handicapper to put you
on top this season

Betting on NFL games is a national pastime. More than \$100 billion is bet every season on pro football (most of it illegally) and the Super Bowl—the most heavily bet single sporting event in history—generates \$11 billion in action on one game alone.

More than half of the U.S. adult population will have some type of wager on this year's Super Bowl. The legal Nevada betting handle on last season's big game was an all-time record-setting \$138 million, but most bets take place outside of legal channels, whether it's over the phone with a bookie, on some offshore betting site or in a pool with coworkers or friends.

Going with your gut, putting money on the Super Bowl champs or taking your home team to repeat against its conference rival might feel like the right move, but it's also a good way to lose. Betting on the game is a lot more fun when you come out a winner. That's where I come in. For 35 years I've been providing point-spread predictions on who will win on the gridiron. Here are some of my favorite rules and tips to wager successfully on this year's NFL season.



PATRIOTS 4:1



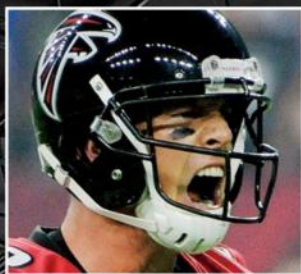
PACKERS 10:1



SEAHAWKS 12:1



STEELERS 12:1



FALCONS 15:1



GIANTS 15:1



-10 -20 -30 -40 50 40- 30- 20- 10-

The Point Spread And The Vig

The point spread is not a prediction as to who will win a football game, nor a measure of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each team. The prime reason the point spread exists is to attempt to equalize the amount of dollars bet on either side of a game.

A bettor has to lay 10 percent (called the vigorish, or vig) of what one attempts to win. For example, if you want to win \$100, you have to lay, or bet, your bookmaker \$110. If you're correct on that wager your payout will be \$210 (your \$110 original bet back, plus \$100 profit). If you lose, you lose the entire \$110. Unlike the stock market (which I call legalized gambling) where you pay a commission whether you're right or wrong, in football betting a commission is only charged on losing bets.

I know a bookmaker who perfectly balanced his books during last year's Super Bowl. He had \$3.3 million to win \$3 million on each team, so no matter who won, he was set to win \$300,000 on the vigorish, paying out \$3 million to Patriots bettors (who were 3-point favorites) and collecting \$3.3 million from Falcons backers, who were getting 3 points. Not a bad weekend's work.

Bet Against No. 2

Go against Super Bowl losers in the first six games of the following season. Super Bowl losers tend to struggle and rarely return to the Super Bowl. (Marv Levy's Bills, an exception, lost four consecutive Super Bowls.) In 2016, Carolina went 1-5 vs. the spread and 1-5 straight up in its first six games after its Super Bowl loss to Denver. In 2015, Seattle also went 1-5 against the spread in its first six regular-season games after losing to New England. That's a money-burning 2-10 against the spread. Even Bernie Madoff's Ponzi scheme couldn't withstand that record. My money will be against the Falcons early in this coming season.

How To Bet The Over/Under

When two offensively potent teams meet, you should bet the under, because they tend to play conservatively, feeling confident they can score anytime. Conversely, if two dominant defensive giants collide, bet the over, because the respective offenses don't fear making a mistake, feeling the defense has its back. That leads to turnovers, which leads to more points.

You can't use this system on the majority of NFL games, as sometimes the two teams are not known for defense or offense, but a mixture of the two, in which case, one should pass on the over/under bet. Three potential under picks this season would be Tom Brady vs. Drew Brees in the Dome on September 17 and Green Bay at Atlanta on September 17, plus Dallas vs. Green Bay in the Jerry Dome October 8. Whereas Baltimore at Minnesota October 22, Houston at Seattle October 29 and Houston at Baltimore November 27 qualify as three over picks. Take the over on Odell Beckham Jr. as far as Page Six mentions in the *New York Post*, whatever the total is, and the under on Rex and Rob Ryan bar fights, as long as the total is no less than five.

Consider The Underdog

I estimate that only one out of 1,000 NFL bettors wins money at season's end, and out of those 1,000 bettors, 80 percent bet favorites. That tells me the best value during the regular season is taking NFL underdogs every week, as the betting line on favorites is inflated. Bookmakers know the public likes to bet on high-profile teams, especially ones that are perceived as good.

Rematches Matter

Division rivals face off twice a year. When a team beats the point spread in the first meeting, bet against that team in the rematch. Last season, division rivals beat the spread 22 times more than they lost in the rematch game against a division rival. My favorite way to use this strategy is taking the road underdog in the rematch. Three out of the four division rival teams in both the AFC and NFC saw their rivals beat the spread in their rematch.

Some games I correctly predicted last season using this rule were the New York Giants, who lost to Washington at home 29-27 (as 3.5-point favorites), then won the rematch at Washington, not only beating the spread as 8-point underdogs but winning the game outright 19-10. Washington, getting three points, lost at home to Dallas 27-23 then beat the spread in the rematch as a 6.5 point dog at Dallas, losing 31-26. New Orleans (-2.5) lost 45-32 to Atlanta, and as a 7.5 road underdog covered the spread in the rematch, losing 38-32. Even lowly Cleveland, who went 1-15 straight up in 2016, lost at home to Pittsburgh 24-9 and covered the 3.5-point spread in a 27-24 overtime loss in the rematch on the road.

Limit Your Bets

One of the biggest keys to winning is to reduce your number of NFL wagers to one to three games per week. Since I started limiting my weekly football point spread predictions (one or two pro games, two to four college games) I have not had a losing season against the spread in the last 17 years. Laying \$11 to win \$10, you have to be correct 52.4 percent of the time versus the point spread to break even, while your bookmaker only has to be right 47.6 percent of the time, which is a huge percentage to overcome if you're betting a lot of games. If you're not a card counter, you have a better chance of winning at blackjack if you play for 30 minutes versus playing for four or more hours at the same table. The percentages increase that each hand against you will eat you and your bankroll alive. It's the same with betting on the NFL: the more games you play, the less chance you'll have to win.

Parlays Don't Pay

More than one-third of a sports book's profits are from parlays, cumulative series of bets where you have to pick multiple winning teams to get paid. Even in my best handicapping years—two years when I was 70 percent vs. the spread in college football—I could not have beaten parlays. If you bet \$100 on a two-team parlay,

VOTED
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BLENDED
SCOTCH
16 YEARS
AND OLDER

Buchanan's 18 Year Old Special Reserve took home the Double Gold Medal this year at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition winning Best Blended Scotch 16 years and older.



James Buchanan & Co.

PLEASE DRINK RESPONSIBLY.
BUCHANAN'S Special Reserve Blended Scotch Whisky,
40% Alc/Vol. Imported by Diageo, Norwalk, CT.

When Officer Eder Loor responded to a situation in East Harlem everything seemed under control – until a man on the scene lashed out, driving a knife deep into Officer Loor’s brain. He was taken immediately to The Mount Sinai Hospital, where a team from the Department of Neurosurgery successfully performed emergency cerebrovascular surgery. Since that day, Officer Loor has had a remarkable recovery. He’s grateful to

the doctors at Mount Sinai. But he’s not the only one. His wife, his two children, and the entire city are grateful as well.

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IT'S
A GOOD THING NEW YORK'S
FINEST WAS IN THE HANDS
OF NEW YORK'S FINEST.



Sheridan's Super Bowl Odds

The Favorites

New England	4:1
Dallas	8:1
Green Bay	10:1

Strong Bets

Pittsburgh	12:1
Seattle	12:1
Oakland	12:1
Atlanta	15:1
N.Y. Giants	15:1

Worth A \$25 Chance

Carolina	25:1
Kansas City	25:1
Arizona	30:1
Denver	30:1
Tampa Bay	50:1
Minnesota	75:1
Baltimore	75:1

Long Shots

Houston	100:1
Indianapolis	100:1
Miami	200:1
Philadelphia	250:1
New Orleans	250:1
Tennessee	300:1
Detroit	1,000:1
Cincinnati	5,000:1
Washington	10,000:1

Don't Even Think Of It

L.A. Chargers	1 Million:1
Jacksonville	5 Million:1
L.A. Rams	1 Billion:1
Buffalo	1 Trillion:1
Chicago	1 Quadrillion:1
San Francisco	1 Quintillion:1
N.Y. Jets	1 Sextillion:1

Are You Kidding?

Cleveland	1 Googolplex: 1
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both teams have to beat the spread for you to win, and if one of the two teams fails you've lost \$100. If you bet the same two teams straight up (laying \$110 to win \$100 on each team), and one team loses and one team wins, you've only lost \$10. In other words, when going 1-1 versus the spread, you lose the entire \$100 on the parlay wager, and only \$10 on betting the two teams straight up. Yes you can go 0-2 straight up vs. the spread, which would lose \$220, instead of \$100 on a two-team parlay, but the odds greatly favor you going 1-1 instead of 0-2. Two team parlays pay 2.6:1 (true odds are 3:1); three team parlays pay 5:1 (true odds are 7:1) and four team parlays pay 10:1 (true odds are 15:1). Hello!

If you wager \$100 on a three-team parlay (which is even more insane) and win two of the three games, you still lose \$100. If you bet those three games separately and win two out of three games, you win money, a profit of \$90.

Stay The Course At Halftime

At halftime, the nation's bookmakers post a new point spread for the second half of the game. If you're going to make a bet at this point, always bet the team at halftime that you think will beat the original line. On the majority of NFL games, this outcome is very hard to predict at halftime. However, when a 7-point underdog is winning 10-0 (or higher), the percentage play is that this underdog will cover the opening line as well as the halftime line. Same thing if a 6-point favorite is winning 28-0 at halftime, go with that team for the second half, regardless of what the halftime line may be.

Revenge Means Covering The Spread

New England shut out Houston 27-0 in Week 3 last season without Tom Brady (who was serving a four-game suspension). With Brady at the helm in the Divisional Playoffs, the Pats (15.5-point favorites) beat Houston 34-16. Underdog Houston plays at New England on September 24 and should be motivated enough to beat the spread. Kansas City, an 18-16 loser at home to Pittsburgh in the Divisional Playoffs, gets its chance at payback on October 15 when it hosts the Steelers.

Know When To Tease

Two-team 6-point teasers are where one can "tease" the line up or down 6 points, but you have to bet on two teams and both have to beat the newly adjusted 6-point line for you to win. In week one, if you tease -7.5 favorite New England down to -1.5 against Kansas City, they have to win by 2 or more, and if you tease Baltimore +2.5 up at Cincinnati, you now receive Baltimore +8.5 for the game.

Over the course of a season, most two-team 6-point teasers are not smart wagers. However there are some that do win money. The trick is to use only the key numbers of +1.5, +2 or +2.5 on an underdog, which you'd tease up to +7.5, +8 or 8.5. Conversely you should tease the key favorite point spread numbers of -7.5, -8 or -8.5 down to -1.5, -2 or -2.5. If you use this system (which has been winning for professional gamblers for years) only lay your bookmaker \$11 to win \$10 on each of these teases and you're a favorite to laugh all the way to the bank this season.

Be Wary Of The Patriots

New England winning its fifth Super Bowl (which I predicted in the NFL preseason preview published in the October 2016 CIGAR AFICIONADO) was impressive, and so was its sensational 16-3 record against the spread. This means New England's line will be inflated every week, especially early in the 2017 season. The public cashed in on the Patriots last season, and bookmakers know people will bet them every game regardless of the line. While I favor New England to win back-to-back Super Bowls, the 2016 Pats played with an us-against-the-world chip on their shoulders, the world being Commissioner Roger Goodell and his Park Avenue organization's unfair Deflategate punishment, suspending Brady for four games and taking away an invaluable first-round pick, both moves aimed at crippling the Patriots. I expect New England to be motivated to defend last year's Super Bowl crown—but I don't expect the Pats to play close to the point-spread level they played at last year. ❖

Danny Sheridan, a frequent contributor to CIGAR AFICIONADO, has been featured in every major newspaper in the United States.

Jordan Spieth rallied to reclaim his lead in winning this year's British Open.





Golf's Top 10 Final Rounds

Some of the most epic acts in golf have been played on the grand stage of the final round

BY JEFF WILLIAMS

When Jordan Spieth won the British Open in dramatic fashion this summer at Royal Birkdale, were you thinking of his splendid opening-round-score of 65? Jack Nicklaus won his final major at the 1986 Masters, but do you remember what he shot in his opening round? Or the score for Arnold Palmer on the first day at the 1960 U.S. Open at Cherry Hills in Denver, the only U.S. Open the great Palmer ever won?

Greatness in golf is defined by multiple victories in the game's major championships. The Masters, U.S. Open, British Open and PGA Championship sit as icons atop golf's tournament pyramid, and those players who win multiple titles are adorned with the respect and adulation that comes with extreme achievement. They become icons themselves. But while every shot counts exactly the same, it's the final round that not only determines the winner, but goes down in history as defining that player, that championship. Some of those rounds are so extraordinary, they put a stamp of iconic brilliance on the game's most accomplished players.

Spieth was tied for the lead after the first round—and sat alone in first place after rounds two and three—but it was his comeback from near disaster on the final day of play that made his win so memorable. Nicklaus opened the 1986 Masters with a 74, was far afield, and at age 46, was written off as a contender. Palmer posted 72 in his first round at the Open and wasn't even on the leaderboard until the final round. It was the final 18 holes of those championships that live on in memory well past the trophy ceremonies. Be it the standard Sunday finish, a Monday playoff or, in Palmer's case, a two-round Saturday final in the U.S. Open, the conclusion of some rounds are just plain epic. Here are the 10 best.

CHRISTIAN PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES

1 Nicklaus Wins His Final Major

It was the second Sunday of April 1986, and Jack Nicklaus was four shots off the lead in the Masters. He was 46, and had not won a major tournament in six years. Time was running out on the greatest of careers. That morning his son Steve called him.

“What do you think Pops?” asked Steve.

“I said ‘66 will tie, 65 will win,’” said Nicklaus.

Guess what?

Greg Norman was the leader that Sunday and a host of the best players in the world crowded the leaderboard—Seve Ballesteros, Nick Price, Tom Watson, Tom Kite and the emerging Payne Stewart. Nicklaus, whose legacy was to never miss a crucial putt in a major, didn’t get off to a great start in the final round and 65 seemed no more than a pipe dream after he missed relatively short birdie chances at six, seven and eight. Then, on the ninth, a wedge gave him an 11-footer. His caddie, son Jack Jr., thought the putt was left edge. Jack thought the line was a little farther out to the left. He went with his gut and the putt dropped in on the left side for a birdie.

Another birdie followed on the par-4 10th, where Nicklaus’ wayward drive to the right stayed in play when it caromed off a spectator. The Golden Bear carded another birdie at the 11th. A bogey at the 12th was maddening, yet he answered with a bird on the next hole. Standing in the fairway after a huge drive on the par-5 15th, Jack turned to his son and said: “How far would a three go here?”

Nicklaus arrowed a 4-iron to 12 feet and drilled it for an eagle 3.

By the time he stepped up to the 16th tee, the huge crowd following him was at a fever pitch. He nearly holed his tee shot as an explosion of sound from the “patrons” raced up the hill and shook the clubhouse. It was birdie again on 17, and after a two-putt par on 18, he posted his 65 and had the lead.

Both Kite and Norman had putts to tie him on 18. Both missed, giving Nicklaus his sixth Green Jacket and 18th and final major.

Nicklaus, who had not won a tournament since 1982, was caught up in the emotion of it all, and determined to put one last exclamation point on his career.

“I said last week I’m not going to quit playing golf when I’m playing this badly,” Nicklaus said to a packed press room. “I’ve played too well for too long to let a short period of time ruin my golf game. I said that I occasionally want to be as good as I once was.”

2 Palmer’s U.S. Open Comeback

Arnold Palmer was well on his way to establishing Arnie’s Army in 1960, having won his second Masters in April, one of eight victories he would post that year alone. But nothing was quite as spectacular as his first and only victory in the U.S. Open at Cherry Hills in Denver.

Back then the U.S. Open concluded with 36 holes on Saturday, and after the first 18 in the morning Palmer trailed leader Mike Souchak by seven shots. Coming from seven strokes behind in the final round to win had never been done before.

In the locker room before the final round Palmer was having a chat with friend and Pittsburgh sports writer Bob Drum. Palmer ventured that a 280 score for 72 holes was often the winning total

for a U.S. Open. He would have to shoot a 65 in the final round to reach that number. He asked Drum what he thought a 65 would do for him.

“For you, nothing,” the crusty Drum replied. “280 won’t do you one damn bit of good. You are too far back.”

Annoyed and fired up by the remark, Palmer went to the first tee determined to play the aggressive style that was rapidly becoming his trademark. The first hole at Cherry Hills was a short, downhill par-4 of about 320 yards, with water defending the green. Palmer had found that water with his opening tee shot of the tournament and made double bogey, but that wasn’t going to hold him back this day. With his whiplash swing, he whaled away with his driver and the ball rolled onto the green. He two-putted for a birdie. “There was an explosive cheer from the gallery on the tee and around the green,” the late Palmer once said of that opening tee shot. “Marching off the tee, I felt a powerful surge of adrenaline.”

Palmer would post a 30 on the front nine despite a bogey on the eighth hole. It was there he spotted Drum in the gallery. “I asked him, ‘Well, well, what are you doing here, since I have no chance?’”

Palmer cooled down on the back nine, but his 35 there allowed him to put up the best final round in Open history to date, a 65. Souchak missed a number of putts down the stretch, giving Palmer the win over an amateur who would become his greatest rival—Jack Nicklaus.

3 Watson’s British Duel

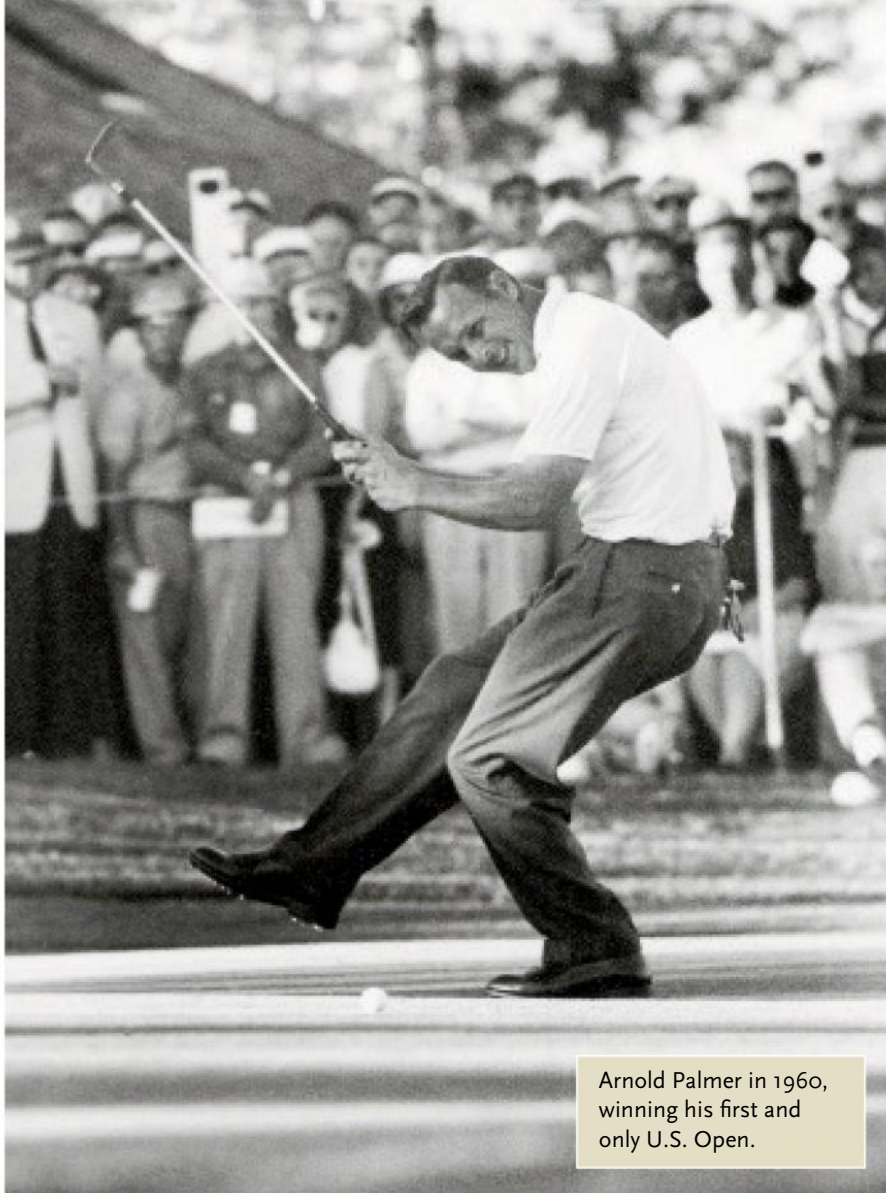
The 1977 Open Championship at Turnberry will forever be known as The Duel in Sun. Extraordinary weather conditions—warmth, sunshine, little wind—provided the perfect milieu for two of the greatest golfers in history to go at each other tooth and nail for the final two rounds.

When Tom Watson and Jack Nicklaus reached the 16th tee in that final round, having distanced themselves by miles from the field, Watson was moved to say this to Nicklaus: “This is what it’s all about, isn’t it?” Nicklaus replied, “You bet.”

The two golfers each shot 65 in the third round to share the 54-hole lead, three shots ahead of Ben Crenshaw. But they quickly bolted ahead of Crenshaw and everyone else, and Nicklaus took a three-shot lead after four holes with a pair of birdies while Watson played that stretch in one over. But Watson got back to even with a birdie on the eighth, his putt slamming with typical aggressiveness into the back of the cup.

The thousands of fans following the pair, their ardor ramped up by the exhilarating display, broke through the ropes on the ninth fairway to get a better view, leading to a 15-minute delay so that the marshals could regain control. That delay seemed to dampen Watson’s charge, and he made bogey, putting him down by a stroke. Nicklaus stretched his lead to two after a birdie on the 12th, then Watson clawed one stroke closer with a birdie on 13.

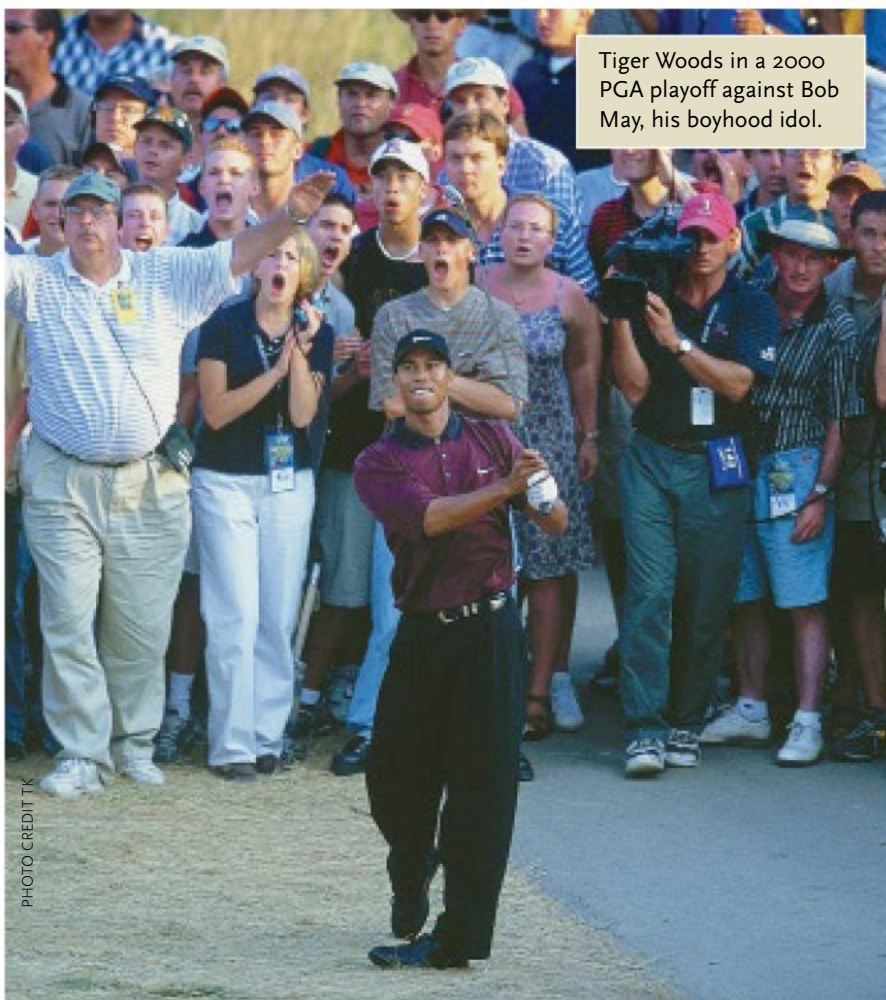
Then came the decisive moment. Watson just missed the green on the par-3 15th, leaving him about 60 feet to the hole. In a typical links play, Watson used his putter, giving the ball a good smack. It took a startling hop into the air before reaching the green, then raced toward the cup at what seemed breakneck speed. The ball clattered into the flagstick square on and fell into



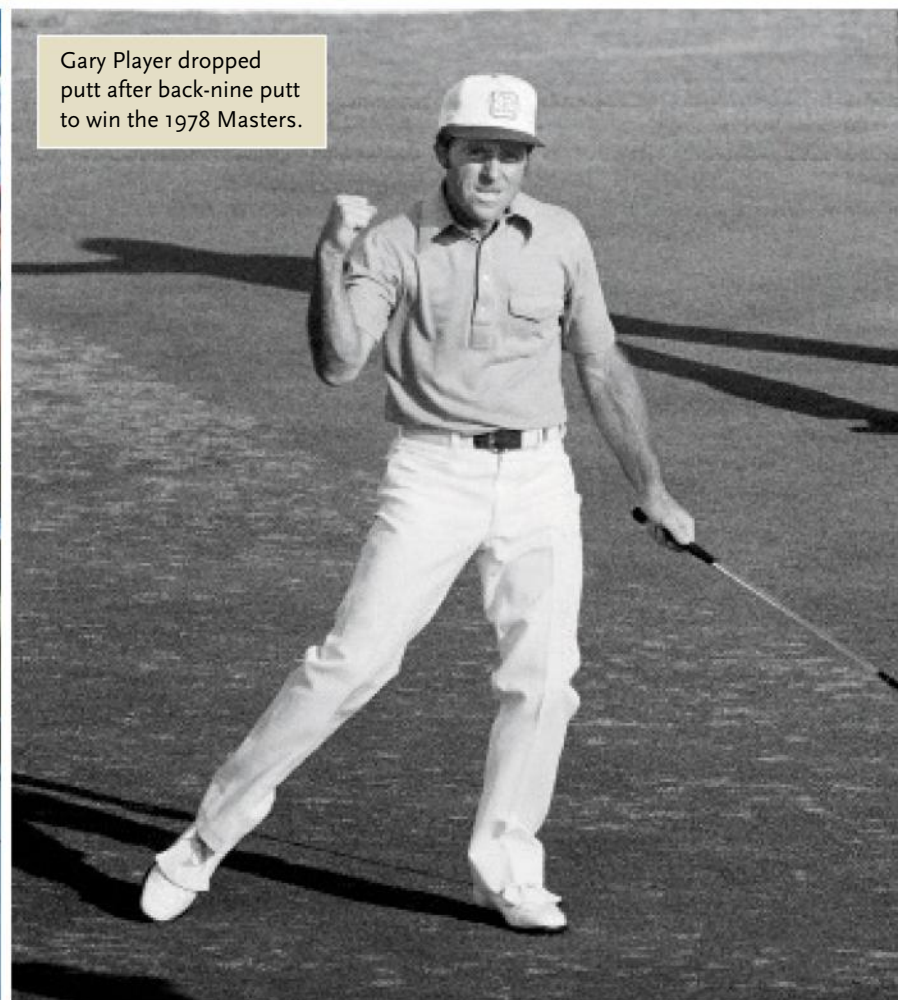
Arnold Palmer in 1960, winning his first and only U.S. Open.



Jack Nicklaus making history in 1986, defying age to win The Masters.



Tiger Woods in a 2000 PGA playoff against Bob May, his boyhood idol.



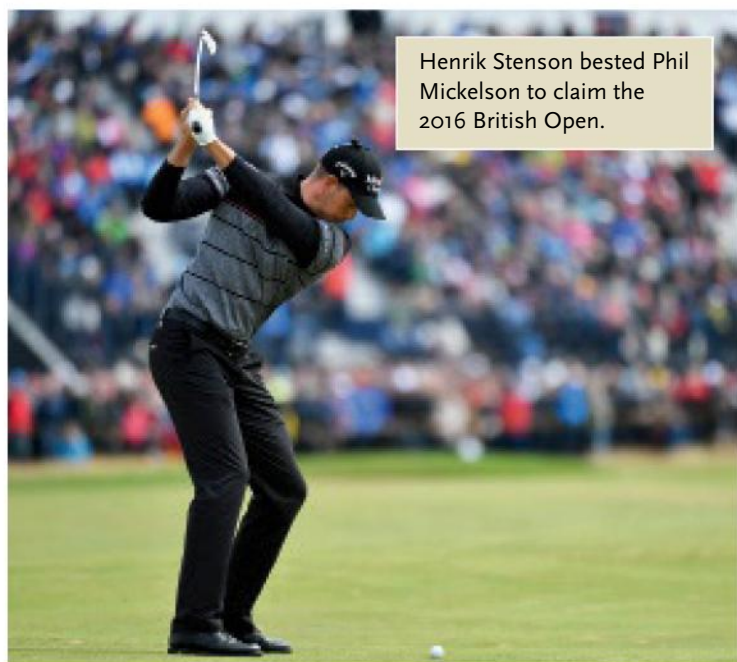
Gary Player dropped putt after back-nine putt to win the 1978 Masters.

the hole for a birdie. Nicklaus missed his far shorter birdie putt, and the two were all square with three to play.

Watson got home in two on the par-5 17th and two-putted for birdie while Nicklaus shockingly missed a three-footer and had to settle for a par. Watson led by a stroke.

The final hole was nothing short of magical. Watson hit a perfect 1-iron off the tee and a 7-iron that came to rest two feet from the pin. Nicklaus had hit a wayward drive into the rough and near a gorse bush. He looked all but doomed. He managed to gouge a shot from there onto the green, 35 feet from the hole. And wouldn't you know it, he canned that putt for birdie and a round of 66. The enormous gallery went ballistic, and Nicklaus, with his characteristic sportsmanship, held up his hands to try to settle them down.

Watson tapped in the most nervous two-footer of his career for a 65 and possession of the Claret Jug. Even more memorably, Nicklaus threw his arm around Watson's shoulders as the two giants of the game strode off the green toward the scorer's tent.



4 Stenson vs. Mickelson

Sunday at the 2016 Open Championship at Royal Troon was two Triple Crown thoroughbreds against a field of plow horses. Henrik Stenson and Phil Mickelson broke from the gate and left everyone else 20 lengths behind by the first turn. By the middle of the front nine on that final round the pair were seven shots clear of the field. "By the sixth hole, it was pretty obvious it was going to be just us," said Mickelson.

There were six lead changes in the first 11 holes. Stenson led by a shot at the start of the round, but that quickly changed when Mickelson birdied the first hole while Stenson made bogey. Stenson rallied with birdies on the second, the third, the fourth, the sixth and the eighth. Mickelson eagled the fourth and birdied the sixth, but still trailed by a shot, and they were tied going to the 14th hole after Stenson's bogey on the 11th.

Coming down the stretch, the two were neck and neck, bouncing off each other. Stenson birdied 14 to go up by one, and then put

down the Hammer of Thor on the 15th when he drained a 51-footer for birdie to lead by two strokes. Stenson birdied the 16th and the 18th to post a 63, the lowest final round by a winner in the history of the Open, 20-under par with a total score of 264. Mickelson's final round of 67 gave him a total of 267, equalling the previous record low at the tournament. He simply couldn't overcome Stenson's astonishing 10 birdies in the final 18 and lost by a staggering three shots. "That is the best I have ever played and not won," Mickelson said. "I threw everything at him that I could."

"I felt that this was going to be my turn," said Stenson in his monotone that betrays his sense of joy and masks his quick wit. "It makes it even more special to beat a competitor like Phil. He's been one of the best to play the game."

5 Spieth Stays On Course

Starting the fourth round of the 2017 British Open at Royal Birkdale in July, Jordan Spieth held a three-shot lead over Matt Kuchar. But he started coming off the rails on the front nine, making three bogies and a birdie through the first six holes.

On the seventh tee, his longtime caddie Michael Greller reminded him of who he is. Greller recalled that Spieth had been vacationing over the Fourth of July in Los Cabos in the company of some of the greatest athletes ever—Michael Jordan, Michael Phelps, Russell Wilson and his buddy Fred Couples, among others. "We walked off 7 tee box, and he made me come back," said Spieth. "He said, 'I've got something to say to you.' He said, 'Do you remember that group you were with? You're that caliber of an athlete. But I need you to believe that right now because you're in a great position in this tournament. This is a new tournament. We're starting over here.'"

It didn't quite start there. Spieth made another bogey on the ninth, and then on the 13th he hit a horrendous drive miles wide right into a sand dune, plugged and dead. From there, he made the most momentous penalty drop of the modern era. Taking relief from an unplayable lie that was so bad that it took 20 minutes to figure out a drop point, Spieth was able to hit a three-iron from the driving range—which was inbounds—back into play on the extremely difficult par-4. From there he hit a decent pitch and sank the most important bogey putt of his career.

That bogey allowed Kuchar, who made par, to take a one-shot lead. But it also fueled Spieth's belief in himself, a seed planted six holes earlier by his caddie.

Spieth nearly made an ace on the 14th and tapped in for birdie. On the next hole, a par-5, he drained a 50-foot putt for eagle. He followed that with a 20-footer for birdie on the par-4 16th, and on the 17th it was another birdie. Five under in four holes. Spieth had left Kuchar and the rest of the field in his dust. After a tap-in par to close the round, Spieth claimed his third major championship at the age of 23, a feat that only Jack Nicklaus had accomplished.

This wasn't so much an epic rally to overtake the field as it was an epic effort to overcome himself. "Michael Jordan and Michael Phelps are the greatest to ever do what they did, and I'm not," Spieth said. "But if you believe you are, then you are almost as good as being that."

His caddie believed, and that's where it started.

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6 Tiger's PGA Playoff

Tiger Woods was smack dab in the middle of the greatest run of his magnificent career when he came to the 2000 PGA Championship at Valhalla Golf Club outside of Louisville. He had won the U.S. Open and British Open by extraordinary margins and was fast establishing himself as one of the greatest players of all time. He was golf's five-star general. But when he started the final round of the final major of the season, he was up against an enlisted man who would not back down. Bob May was a shot back, and their Sunday duel would go down as one of golf's all-time best.

It was no small irony that Woods and May would find themselves paired. Both had grown up in Southern California and May, seven years older than Woods, had been a dominant junior and amateur player, so much so that he had become Woods' idol. A young Tiger had even pinned newspaper clips of May's exploits on his bedroom wall.

Unexpectedly, May had the lead after the par-5 second hole where he made birdie to Woods' bogey. May was up by two after a birdie on the fourth, but Woods drew back to even with birdies on seven and eight.

The quality of the golf was brilliant and birdies abounded. The 15th would prove pivotal. Woods missed the green and May had maybe 12 feet for birdie. Woods holed a 15-footer for par and May missed. Woods made birdie on the 17th to draw the match even, and they both made birdie on the 18th. The championship would be decided by the first three-hole playoff in PGA Championship history.

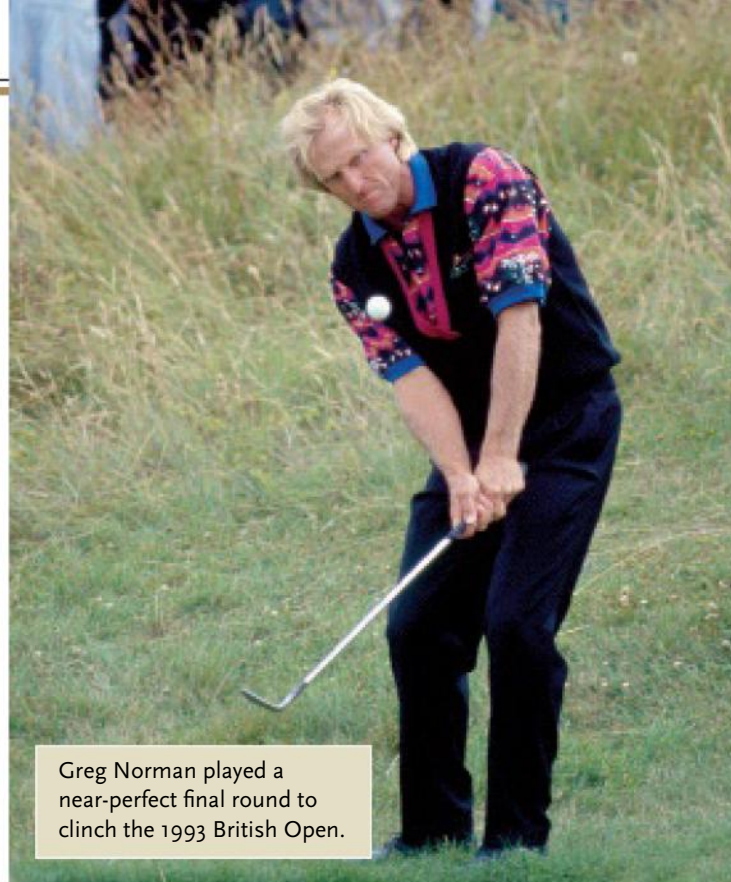
It began on the 16th and produced one of Tiger's supreme moments. He knew his 20-footer for birdie was destined for the hole when it was five feet away. He virtually danced after it, pointing his index finger at the cup. In it dropped. Woods was up by a stroke. Both scrambled to make pars on the last two holes, but Woods had prevailed.

After winning the U.S. Open by 15 strokes and the British Open by eight, Woods saw this victory as the most exhilarating. "This was probably the most exciting from a player's standpoint," he said. "The fact you are playing at a level that is so high, and knowing the fact that par is not going to win a hole."

7 Norman Takes On The World

Greg Norman, he of the epic losses in major championships, put on his own epic performance to win the British Open at Royal St. Georges in the south of England in 1993. He had spent his entire career trying to live up to his own high expectations and live down his own spectacular failures. He had one major to his credit, the 1986 British Open at Turnberry where nary one of the best players in the world was there at the end to challenge him. But at St. Georges they were all there. Nick Faldo, Bernhard Langer, Corey Pavin, Fred Couples, Nick Price and the blossoming Ernie Els, all in the hunt on the final.

The first day of the tournament was nasty, and Norman started the road to the championship with a double bogey, hitting his tee shot into nearly waist-high hay. But after three rounds, Norman had clawed into contention, trailing Faldo and Pavin by a stroke. Then, in the final 18, he went on a tear.



Greg Norman played a near-perfect final round to clinch the 1993 British Open.

His final round started with a birdie at the first hole. After two more Norman had a two-shot lead after the sixth hole, and it would never be less than a shot for the rest of the day. His iron play was superb, his putting spot on, save for missing a 14-inch par putt on the 17th. In the end, after seven birdies and a solitary bogey, he posted a six-under-par 64 to win by two shots over Faldo.

"I am in awe of myself," Norman said when it was all over, a glint in his eye. "In my entire career I can honestly say that I never have gone around a golf course and not missed a shot. But today I hit every iron perfect, every drive perfect."

And in doing so he earned his second, and final major.

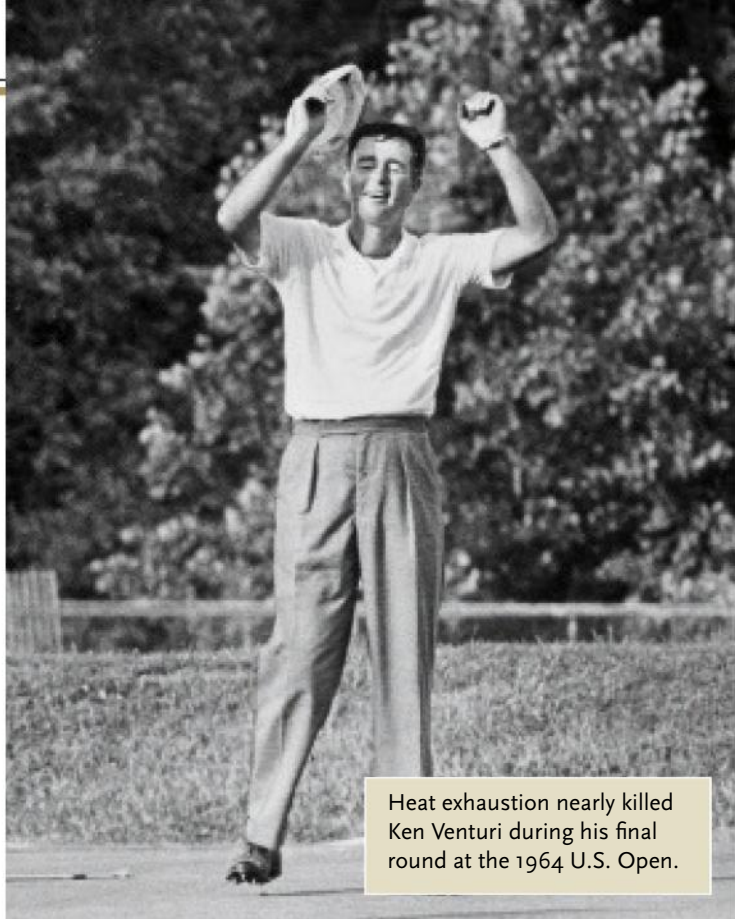
8 Player's Magic Sunday

Almost as old as the magnolia trees that line the entrance to the Augusta National Golf Club is the maxim "the Masters doesn't begin until the back nine on Sunday." And that adage rang true in 1978 when Gary Player, at age 42, charged from behind on the final day.

He started the round seven strokes back, with Tom Watson, Hubert Green and Rod Funseth taking turns at the top of the leaderboard. Player, ever the bubbly enthusiast, still felt he had a chance, even though he was teeing off two hours before the leaders.

He had been playing well through three rounds without making many putts. By his account, they had to start going in. "One of the things I am is an eternal optimist," he said. "I was playing excellent golf and I hadn't made any putts. But you have to keep on aiming at them."

And so he did. Player shot 34 on the front nine, which didn't make a big dent in the lead, but the frontrunners were not pulling away. On the difficult tenth hole, Player posted a rare birdie with a curling 25-footer. On the devilish par-3 12th he holed it from 15 feet. He hit the par-5 13th in two and his eagle putt burned the edge, but it was a gimme birdie. He two-putted the par-5 15th from 75 feet for another birdie. In went another 15-footer on the



16th. On the 18th, yet another 15-footer dropped for birdie, giving him a round of 64.

As Player had blitzed forward, the leaders backed up, but they all had putts on the 18th hole to tie him. Funseth missed from 15 feet, Watson from 10. Agonizingly, Green missed a three-footer, one of golf's most memorable yips. Instead of facing a playoff, Player donned his third green jacket, giving him his ninth and final major championship.

"This is a course of great momentum," Player would say later. "That's why there have been so many great comebacks in Masters history. And when you come to the final nine holes on Sunday afternoon, you really never know what will happen."

9 Trevino Takes Down Nicklaus

In 1971, Jack Nicklaus got snakebit at the U.S. Open at Merion, the iconic championship course in suburban Philadelphia. The snake charmer was Lee Trevino.

The two were tied after 72 holes, with Trevino shooting 69-69 the first two rounds. They would go to an 18-hole playoff on Monday, a hot, humid, sticky day. As Trevino took a few warm-up swings, his golf glove was squishy, so he went to his bag for a new one. There he found a fresh glove and a novel idea.

"I reached into my bag to get another one and there was the rubber snake in the bag," Trevino would say. He had been using the snake and a hatchet as props to show the galleries how deep the notorious U.S. Open rough was. "I picked the snake up by its tail and Jack is over on the side of the tee and was kind of laughing. So I throw the snake over to Jack."

Nicklaus, who was sitting on a seat-stick, wasn't sure the snake was real and he laughed nervously. After taking a few seconds to figure out it was rubber, Nicklaus tossed it back.

Trevino thought he might have been punished for his prank when he made bogey on the first hole, but then Nicklaus had

difficulty in the bunkers on the next two holes to make bogey and double bogey. "I was very nervous, very nervous," said Trevino. "I bogied No. 1 right off the bat, Jack bogied two by leaving it in the bunker. We went to three and he left it in the bunker again. When we went to the fourth hole I said he might be choking worse than I am."

After the sixth hole, a storm delayed play. And it steeled Trevino's confidence, knowing he had a better chance of holding his approaches on the softened greens. He would make three birdies over the next 12 holes, post a 68 to Nicklaus' 71 and win his second U.S. Open.

"Everyone has someone who drives them," Trevino would say years later. "Jack drove me. I could have pneumonia, but if I was paired with Jack, let's go. He was the best. And Jack brought the best out of me every time we played."

10 Venturi's Near-Death Win

Sports is rarely a matter of life and death. But at the 1964 U.S. Open at the Congressional Country Club, it was for Ken Venturi. The accomplished pro seemed destined for major championship greatness when injuries from an auto accident in 1961 severely impacted his game. By the time 1964 rolled around, he only got into the tournament by going through both the local and sectional qualifiers. After two rounds he was six shots off the lead. The 1964 Open would be the final one with a 36-hole finish on Saturday, and Venturi certainly made it an epic one, heroically staggering home in the final round for the victory.

The temperature that day was about 100 degrees. Ray Floyd, his playing partner, remembers it vividly. "You could leave your hotel room with a fresh shirt and be soaked by the time you got to your car."

Venturi fired a brilliant 66 in the morning round, but in the closing holes his body started to succumb to the trying conditions. He bogied the 17th and 18th, teetering as he walked to the scorer's tent. He was taken to the clubhouse where a doctor had him wrapped in cold towels and gave him salt pills. He laid on the floor in front of his locker. Then the doctor told him he should withdraw. Playing the afternoon round could be fatal.

"It's better than the way I'd been living," Venturi recalled. "I'm going out there."

Was he going to win? Heck, was he going to finish? Was he going to live?

Walking slowly, uncertainly, Venturi played steadily. When he birdied the ninth hole, he had the lead. "He was making shots, you knew it was destiny, that he's going to get through here," said Floyd.

By the time he started down the hill on the 18th, Venturi knew the Open was his. He took off his white tam hat, which had been pulled down tight during the round to keep as much sun off his face as he could.

When his final putt dropped for a round of 70, it was Floyd who bent over to take the ball out of the hole. Floyd had tears in his eyes. When Venturi saw that, he said, "I lost it."

It was a staggering final day of the U.S. Open, and a staggering victory for Venturi. ♦

Jeff Williams is a contributing editor of CIGAR AFICIONADO.



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A blind-tasting of 80 cigars from every major region that produces high-quality, premium tobacco.
- 138 SUBLIME SMOKES**
Put a few decades of age on a Cuban Hoyo de Monterrey and it goes from an everyday favorite to a near-perfect, all-time great. It still has a long life ahead of it, as does a special Cuban cigar made exclusively for Mexico.
- 140 10 THINGS EVERY CIGAR LOVER SHOULD KNOW**
The world of premium cigars can be vast and mysterious, but senior editor Greg Mottola has simplified some of the basic tenets of tobacco in a practical way. As your knowledge of this hobby grows, so will your appreciation.
- 148 THE NEW RULES OF CUBA**
Between President Obama loosening restrictions on Cuban travel and President Trump tightening them again, you may be confused as to what's legal and what isn't. Cuba analyst Peter Kornbluh sheds some light on the new policy.

Translating to “The Truth” in French, the Tatuaje La Vérité 2013 scored 92 points. It’s a rare cigar, but not for reasons you might think. While the smoke is indeed rare in the sense that few were made, it’s also unusual because this is an estate cigar—all the tobacco in (and on) the La Vérité 2013 is not only from a 2013 crop, but it all comes from the La Estrella farm, owned by the Garcia family in Nicaragua. The tobacco types change each year La Vérité is released depending on what the farm grows. This release is a combination of Criollo ’98, Corojo ’99 and another Cuban seed that brand-owner Pete Johnson simply calls Habano. Two cigars scored 91 points, both from Nicaragua. The Archetype Axis Mundi is made by Drew Estate for California-based Ventura Cigars. The somewhat cerebral name refers to the supposedly recurring symbols and universal tropes found in the dreams and myths of all people and civilizations. Longtime cigar smokers might be surprised to find a Nat Cicco rated within the pages of this magazine. Better known as an inexpensive cigar, Nat Cicco went premium with its Aniversario 1965 Liga No. 4.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

TATUAJE LA VÉRITÉ LA VÉRITÉ 2013

This cigar has a lush draw and even burn. Pleasant notes of hickory and vanilla bean become more refined, taking on hints of coconut and piquant red pepper zing.
U.S.: \$20.00 U.K.: N/A

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: INDONESIA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ARCHETYPE AXIS MUNDI CHURCHILL

A long cigar with a substantial draw that leaves sweet impressions of dark chocolate, hickory and black cherry on the palate. The finish hints of chewy nougat.
U.S.: \$13.00 U.K.: N/A

91



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

NAT CICCICO ANIVERSARIO 1965 LIGA NO. 4 CHURCHILL

Squarely, symmetrically pressed with an oily wrapper and chopped pigtail cap. Up front acidity disappears for a leathery, meaty smoke sweetened by notes of molasses and toffee.
U.S.: \$6.50 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A/CONN. BROADLEAF

ARTURO FUENTE CHURCHILL MADURO

Dark and imposing, this large cigar imparts the dark chocolate and licorice notes that a near-black wrapper suggests, however, it’s balanced by a medium-bodied base of almonds and wood.
U.S.: \$6.45 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

L'ATELIER CÔTE D'OR 2017

This Churchill wears a dark, nearly flawless cover leaf. It’s a bold smoke, redolent of hickory wood, toast and earth. The finish is long and toasty.
U.S.: \$16.00 U.K.: N/A

90

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: NOVEMBER 2015

ROMEO Y JULIETA CHURCHILL

Sweet and fruity with notes of coconut and cedar. There's an earthy undertone as well, but the smoke is a bit thin from the firm draw.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £25.80

90**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

EL GALAN HABANO NATURAL CHURCHILL

Toasty and slightly sweet, this Churchill offers an almond-paste nuttiness with a tangy, mineral finish. A mild to medium-bodied smoke.

U.S.: \$5.80 U.K.: N/A

89**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 7/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

JOYA DE NICARAGUA ANTAÑO 1970 CHURCHILL

Strikingly oily and dark, this Churchill is solid to the touch yet draws and burns evenly. There are pronounced notes of licorice and anise as well as meaty, leathery notes and a rye bread finish. A full-bodied cigar.

U.S.: \$8.30 U.K.: N/A

89**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS, PANAMA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ALEC BRADLEY BLACK MARKET CHURCHILL

A dark, gleaming Churchill that starts strong with earthy, woody and nutty notes but loses intensity. There's a faint hint of brown sugar on the finish.

U.S.: \$8.45 U.K.: N/A

88**U.S.A.**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

DON PEPIN GARCIA ORIGINAL DELICIAS

A medium- to full-bodied Churchill that combines generic notes of earth and cola with bitter hints of Fernet-Branca liqueur. The herbal finish leaves a licorice aftertaste.

U.S.: \$8.55 U.K.: N/A

88**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

PADILLA ANNIVERSARY CHURCHILL

Besides a few large veins, the reddish-brown wrapper of this Churchill is attractive. The cigar is redolent of hickory-smoked meat and woody mesquite, but loses some intensity.

U.S.: \$11.00 U.K.: N/A

88**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SAN LOTANO CONNECTICUT CHURCHILL

A solidly rolled, yellowish cigar with touches of vanilla and wood. The smoke becomes more floral and builds to a mild leather finish.

U.S.: \$7.80 U.K.: N/A

88**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 6 7/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

CASA MAGNA COLORADO CHURCHILL

A tightly packed Churchill with an even burn and substantial draw. Predominant notes of earth and wood also show a sweet chocolate and nut intonation, but the finish is slightly damp.

U.S.: \$7.92 U.K.: N/A

87

The iconic Cuban Montecristo No. 2 tends to overshadow some other great cigars within the Montecristo number series, specifically the Montecristo No. 3, which scored 92 points, placing highest in the corona category. Though a small cigar, each puff possesses all the complexity, body and resonance that one would expect from one of the most famous names in cigars. The MBombay Habano Corona scored 91 points and is a relative newcomer to the world of premium smokes. Made in Costa Rica, MBombay is only three years old and is owned by Mel Shah, an IT-professional-turned-tobacconist-cum-cigar-brand-owner. Cigar enthusiasts don't necessarily need to spend a lot of money to get a satisfying smoking experience. The Padrón Londres scored 91 points and carries a suggested retail price of less than \$5. The Londres are part of Padrón's core line of cigars. These examples had a bold, rustic edge to them, but also exhibited some of the elegance and complexity of Padrón's pricier smokes. As is typical to the brand, the Londres are a medium- to full-bodied combination of brawny earth and sophisticated sweetness.



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2014

MONTECRISTO NO. 3

Crafted with a three-seam cap, this cigar starts with a floral and coconut character that frames a core of graham cracker, wood and coffee bean.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £17.40

92



COSTA RICA
RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: PERU, NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MBOMBAY HABANO CORONA

A veiny little cigar with strong, meaty notes of salt and walnut, but possesses the sweetness of caramel and nougat. Brawny and flavorful.

U.S.: \$6.49 U.K.: N/A

91



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN LONDRES

Rustic tones of rawhide and earth carry some elegance with a nougat and caramel sweetness. A medium- to full-bodied smoke.

U.S.: \$4.70 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA, PERU
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

H. UPMANN VINTAGE CAMEROON CORONA

An exceptionally nutty smoke with a rich, luxurious mouthfeel. Notes of honey, oak and dried flowers also unfold with each puff.

U.S.: \$5.50 U.K.: N/A

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA, PERU
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA AURORA 1495 NO. 4

Tasty and bold with a superb draw. Its coffee-like characteristics are balanced by notes of toasted wheat, dried cherries and a peppery finish.

U.S.: \$6.99 U.K.: N/A

90



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016

PARTAGÁS CORONA SENIOR (TUBO)
There's an attractive reddish hue to this corona, though the draw is a bit firm. The smoke combines nuanced notes of leather and ginger with floral elements and a breadly finish.
U.S.: N/A ITALY: 6.50 EURO

90



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2014

H. UPMANN MAJESTIC
Squarely pressed with a reddish-brown wrapper, this corona imparts a nutty and woody smoke with hints of leather and licorice, but leaves an ashy aftertaste.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £10.00

89



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LA AROMA DE CUBA CORONA
Near black in appearance, this corona draws quite evenly and consistently. Notes of toffee and nuts are met with white pepper and charred oak finish.
U.S.: \$5.40 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA FLOR DOMINICANA AIR BENDER PODEROSO
This corona's woody core of oak and hickory is overlaid with sweeter notes of caramel marshmallow. The tobacco becomes increasingly earthy and powerful.
U.S.: \$7.50 U.K.: N/A

89



U.S.A.
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA PALINA COLLECTION MR. SAM CORONA
Leathery and brassy with a bold earthy core and a creamy finish. A well-made cigar with a fine draw and burn.
U.S.: \$11.00 U.K.: N/A

89



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 45 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: HONDURAS, DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PUNCH ELITE EMS
A slightly pressed corona that delivers a tangy, woody smoke and underlying earthiness. Simple and fairly full bodied for such a small cigar.
U.S.: \$3.79 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: INDONESIA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

CHARTER OAK CT SHADE PETIT CORONA
Enveloped in a light wrapper that extends over the uncut foot. The draw is open and full, showing a woody profile of cedar and balsa along with a dry, vermouth-like sweetness and a peppery finish.
U.S.: \$4.80 U.K.: N/A

87



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF GRAND CRU NO. 2
First puffs of this light, tan corona are musty and soapy, but the mustiness fades to show notes of citrus and ginger before a mild, dry finish.
U.S.: \$16.90 U.K.: N/A

87

corona gordas

After Rocky Patel created his Platinum line, he decided to give it a special offshoot—the Limited Edition Habano. The Toro scored 92 points thanks to the combination of dark, Ecuadoran Habano wrapper and blend of Mexican and Nicaraguan tobaccos. It's made in Nicaragua at the Tavicusa factory that Patel co-owns. The Cuban Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 1 scored 91 points and is a favorite among smokers of all levels for a simple reason: it's complex enough for discerning palates, yet mild enough for beginners. Made by My Father Cigars in Nicaragua, the Nestor Miranda Collection Corojo Toro also achieved 91 points and is as flavorful as its alluring wrapper suggests.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROCKY PATEL PLATINUM LIMITED EDITION HABANO TORO

Dark and box-pressed with a reddish-brown wrapper, this bold smoke starts strong with earth and black pepper before taking on a nutty sweetness.
U.S.: \$12.20 U.K.: N/A

92



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: NOVEMBER 2016

HOYO DE MONTERREY EPICURE NO. 1

While the veiny wrapper is not the most pristine, the cigar is full of sweet, woody and floral intonations that build to a chocolate-like finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £20.60

91



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

NESTOR MIRANDA COLLECTION COROJO TORO

An attractive cigar covered in an oily Colorado wrapper. Its even draw imparts a meaty, cedary smoke with touches of coffee that lead to a sweet, burnt toffee finish.
U.S.: \$8.99 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

E.P. CARRILLO DUSK STOUT TORO

Enrobed in a dark cover leaf, this tightly packed cigar is a primarily earthy smoke balanced by hints of raisin and licorice. The finish shows more raisin sweetness.
U.S.: \$7.60 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: BRAZIL
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO

LIGA PRIVADA T52 TORO

Though packed solid with tobacco, the draw is open and lush, imparting an oaky, leathery smoke with notes of malted chocolate and toast.
U.S.: \$14.33 U.K.: N/A

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ASHTON HERITAGE PURO SOL ROBUSTO

The initial sweet, fruitiness of the smoke becomes heavier with leather and earth. A meaty undertone also emerges before a graphite finish.
U.S.: \$9.80 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS,
BRAZIL
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

BELLAS ARTES SHORT CHURCHILL

First puffs of this box-pressed cigar are slightly sweet with caramel and cedar but pick up heavy, intense notes of peanut that linger on the finish.
U.S.: \$8.30 U.K.: N/A

89**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: NOVEMBER 2016

H. UPMANN MAGNUM 50

The draw of this medium-bodied cigar is slightly firm, though offers a consistently woody, nutty smoke. Simple and straightforward.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £25.20

89**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

LAS MAREAS CICLOPES

An attractive-looking corona gorda with an even draw and burn. Its chewy, nutty smoke imparts hints of cedar before a dusty finish.
U.S.: \$10.50 U.K.: N/A

89**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

PEDRO MARTÍN MADURO TORO

Big, immediate notes of earth and oak are balanced by a brown sugar sweetness, but they dissipate quickly on the short, dry finish.
U.S.: \$9.94 U.K.: N/A

89**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, PERU, BRAZIL,
HONDURAS, DOM. REP.
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

AVO SYNCRO SOUTH AMERICA RITMO TORO

With a full draw and even burn, this box-pressed cigar leaves impressions of caramel, toast and sliced almonds on the palate before a slightly sweet, earthy finish.
U.S.: \$11.90 U.K.: N/A

88**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

VILLIGER COLORADO TORO

A nutty, woody cigar with earthy underpinnings and touches of licorice, but the finish is a bit dry. Medium- to full-bodied.
U.S.: \$7.35 U.K.: N/A

88**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, BRAZIL
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROBERTO P. DURAN SIGNATURE TAÍNO

Bitter at first, this thick toro develops a spicy white pepper and cardamom character before an herbal finish.
U.S.: \$11.00 U.K.: N/A

87**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

HAMMER + SICKLE MOSCOW CITY ROBUSTO EXTRA

The strong, earthy start of this dark, oily cigar becomes damp and musty-tasting. Intermittent notes of cedar and orange peel are affected by the mustiness.
U.S.: \$9.50 U.K.: N/A

86

figurados

The figurados category is normally a section of high achievement, as these cigars require the rollers to have exceptional skill. Whether it be a short belicoso, long torpedo or double-tapered salomon, shapely cigars are the result of the most talented *torcedores*. Three such cigars in our tasting scored 92 points. The 601 Red Label Habano Torpedo has been made in a few different facilities over the years, but is currently produced at the San Lotano factory, which is owned by A.J. Fernandez. Brand owner Erik Espinosa turned the line over to Fernandez after he reached maximum capacity at his own La Zona factory. Both factories are in Nicaragua. The Cuban Diplomaticos No. 2 is the lone cigar left in the line. Many fans consider it to be a less-expensive version of the ever-popular Montecristo No. 2. This has never been confirmed by Habanos S.A. but its performance here indicates that this lesser-known cigar is worthy of any humidor. The Oliva Serie V continues to be the cigar that consistently delivers a lot of flavor and body at a relatively low price. Like the 601, it's loaded with great tobacco and retails for less than \$10.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

601 RED LABEL HABANO TORPEDO

A pointy torpedo whose nutty, woody core of cedar and walnuts is framed by notes of honeyed tea and a mineral finish.
U.S.: \$7.95 U.K.: N/A

92



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2017

DIPLOMATICOS NO. 2

Sweet and rich with malted chocolate flavor, caramel notes and coffee bean. The smoke is balanced by a leathery note. A medium- to full-bodied torpedo.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £21.00

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

OLIVA SERIE V BELICOSO

Enrobed in a dark, pristine wrapper, this small figurado shows rich notes of earth and spicy leather, interwoven with nutty touches of cashews and molasses.
U.S.: \$8.36 U.K.: N/A

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

CAO L'ANNIVERSAIRE CAMEROON BELICOSO

Sweet, chewy notes of almond and vanilla bean are balanced by a rich, pleasant coffee quality that extends to the finish. A tasty, box-pressed belicoso.
U.S.: \$8.19 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

MANUEL QUESADA 70TH BELICOSO

A figurado with an oily wrapper. Its lush draw delivers a sweet-and-savory combination of leather, chocolate-covered almonds, and a hint of red wine acidity.
U.S.: \$12.50 U.K.: N/A

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

FLORES Y RODRIGUEZ CONNECTICUT VALLEY RESERVE AZUL FIGURADO

Well constructed with a tapered head and foot, this figurado has an open draw that delivers a bold, earthy smoke with hints of chocolate and a slight, copper aftertaste.
U.S.: \$19.00 U.K.: N/A

89



BAHAMAS
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS, GREECE, COSTA RICA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

GRAYCLIFF CRYSTAL PIRATE

An attractive torpedo that leaves light impressions of cocoa powder and coffee bean on the palate, but the finish is very tangy.
U.S.: \$20.75 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 3 15/16"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

UNDERCROWN SHADE FLYING PIG

A chubby little figurado with a tightly wound pigtail cap. The creamy, woody smoke carries touches of citrus and spice leading to a sweet finish.
U.S.: \$12.72 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: CAMEROON
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CROMAGNON AQUITAINE MODE 5

A perfectly constructed perfecto with a dark, oily wrapper. It's a toasty, woody smoke that takes on a licorice sweetness before a heavy charcoal finish.
U.S.: \$7.80 U.K.: N/A

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 5 7/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

AGING ROOM SMALL BATCH M35611 FORTE

Strong and tangy, this oily perfecto has a woody core of oak and cedar that segues into an earthy, mineral-heavy finish.
U.S.: \$9.99 U.K.: N/A

87



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALEC BRADLEY PRENSADO TORPEDO

A box-pressed torpedo with a slightly airy draw and uneven burn. Initial puffs impart salty, mineral notes to the palate before hints of mushroom and a spicy, black pepper finish.
U.S.: \$12.50 U.K.: N/A

87



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6 3/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DIAMOND CROWN MAXIMUS PYRAMID NO. 3

The initial charred-earth and heavily roasted coffee notes of this dark torpedo calm down to show a sweeter smoke of vanilla and black cherry.
U.S.: \$18.45 U.K.: N/A

87



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

KRISTOFF MADURO TORPEDO

Near-black with an uncut foot. It's an earthy smoke leaving notes of licorice, minerals and a floral quality that borders on soapy.
U.S.: \$9.26 U.K.: N/A

87

lonsdales

One would expect an elegant size like the lonsdale to grant an elegant smoke upon first light. This expectation was met by a trio of cigars that all scored 91 points. The Illusione F9 is one of the original sizes of the brand's core line. Originally produced in Honduras, Illusiones were moved to the TABSA factory in Estelí, Nicaragua, which is owned by the same company that grows all of Illusione's tobacco—Aganorsa. But Illusione isn't the only brand benefitting from this operation. The Maestro del Tiempo 5205 by Warped Cigars is made in the same factory and uses tobacco grown from the same agricultural firm. Both cigars are a testament to the distinctive tobacco and fine production coming from both Aganorsa and TABSA. It's easy for the lonsdale to get lost among the better-selling torpedos, toros and robustos of Rocky Patel's Decade line, but Patel pays his respect to this classic size by making it a fantastic smoke. It's rolled in Nestor Plasencia's El Paraiso factory, a facility dedicated almost exclusively to the production of Rocky Patel cigars. It was released in 2008 to commemorate Patel's 10 years in the business, which is now going 20.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ILLUSIONE F9

Oils are seeping through the wrapper of this slim cigar, which combines the botanical flavors of juniper, anis and vanilla with heady notes of chocolate-covered almonds.

U.S.: \$9.95 U.K.: N/A

91



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 6 3/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

MAESTRO DEL TIEMPO 5205

A beautiful lonsdale crafted with four neat seams at the head. The smoke is dense and toasty with notes of nutmeg and clove. Hints of mesquite and fresh fennel resonate on the palate.

U.S.: \$9.14 U.K.: N/A

91



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROCKY PATEL DECADE LONSDALE

Gleaming with oil, this softly pressed lonsdale smacks of lemon zest and ginger. There's a slight nuttiness that leads to a sweet, licorice finish.

U.S.: \$10.55 U.K.: N/A

91



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MAY 2016

MONTECRISTO NO. 1

The floral smoke of this slim cigar also shows notes of almond paste and earth. There is an elegant touch of vanilla cream on the finish.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £20.00

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

ASHTON 8-9-8

Light in appearance, this lonsdale shows a surprisingly rich, woody character with notes of baking spice that culminate in a graham-cracker finish.

U.S.: \$9.35 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**PADRÓN 1964 ANNIVERSARY SERIES
SUPERIOR MADURO**

Slender and pressed with a soft head. Initial saltiness sharpens and becomes earthy, especially on the finish, though there's a hint of caramel sweetness.
U.S.: \$11.00 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MY FATHER CEDROS DELUXE CERVANTES

Made with a three-seam cap, this lonsdale has an even draw and flawless burn. It's a nutty, earthy smoke with some hickory notes but the finish is dry.
U.S.: \$8.90 U.K.: N/A

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

NAT SHERMAN STERLING DALIAS

Herbal and woody with floral notes and hints of graham cracker. A bit of cinnamon comes through as well before the dry pecan finish.
U.S.: \$14.00 U.K.: N/A

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., MEXICO
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

PARTAGAS NO. 1

A solidly rolled lonsdale packed tightly with tobacco. Its draw is firm, offering unusual combinations ranging from briny oysters and leather to sweet almond paste and bread dough. The finish is floral.
U.S.: \$8.19 U.K.: N/A

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: INDONESIA

**ROMEO Y JULIETA 1875
CEDRO DELUXE NO. 1**

Gritty and sandy in appearance, this lonsdale burns and draws perfectly. Sweet notes of corn and bread carry a touch of cedar and acidity.
U.S.: \$7.09 U.K.: N/A

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 5/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MONTECRISTO WHITE ESPECIAL NO. 1

The matte wrapper of this tan, thin cigar isn't particularly oily. Its mild straw-and-hay character delivers some sweet vanilla and citrus notes as well.
U.S.: \$10.04 U.K.: N/A

87

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., MEXICO
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

**MACANUDO CAFÉ
BARON DE ROTHSCHILD**

A golden panatela with a slight, oily gleam to the wrapper. Faint cedar notes and sweet earth precede a mineral finish.
U.S.: \$7.69 U.K.: N/A

86

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

THE GRIFFIN'S NO. 300

Both the draw and burn of this lonsdale are perfect, however its nutty, woody properties are offset by persistent sourness.
U.S.: \$10.00 U.K.: N/A

86

robustos

In the 11 years the Cuban Romeo y Julieta Short Churchill has been made, it's never scored as high as it did in this tasting. The beautiful cigar scored 94 points and was absolutely sublime in its vibrancy, harmony and finessing of rich flavors without being too heavy handed. Cuban Romeo y Julieta Churchills are now somewhat of a brand within a brand—Churchill, Wide Churchill, Petit Churchill, etc. In lieu of the choices, the Short Churchill's near-classic score should make your decision a little easier. Fuente's Don Carlos Personal Reserve scored 91 points. It started as the late Carlos Fuente's personal blend and was finally released commercially in very limited quantities.



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: NOVEMBER 2015

ROMEO Y JULIETA SHORT CHURCHILL
A sublime and complex composition of ripe apple and toasty qualities that develop oaky, red wine notes, rich leather and a sweet toffee finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £19.60

94



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

ARTURO FUENTE DON CARLOS PERSONAL RESERVE
This well-made cigar produces a perfectly solid ash. Rich intonations of baking spices, gingerbread and cinnamon fold into a nougat and tea-like finish. Sweet and spicy.
U.S.: \$13.75 U.K.: N/A

91



U.S.A.
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

CASA FERNANDEZ AGANORSA LEAF ROBUSTO
There's a large, deep divot in the head of this cigar after cutting the cap, but the draw remains lush and even. It's earthy and fresh, spiced up with a clove quality and herbal finish.
U.S.: \$7.98 U.K.: N/A

90



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2016

COHIBA ROBUSTO
The heavy floral notes of this medium-bodied robusto are balanced by a creamy, white chocolate sweetness, touches of ginger snap and a bready finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £29.60

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

H. UPMANN BY AJ FERNANDEZ ROBUSTO
This well-made robusto has an even draw and burn that offers notes of black cherry and nuts with a sweet vanilla oakiness.
U.S.: \$7.25 U.K.: N/A

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

LA AURORA 1903 CAMEROON ROBUSTO
An oily, veiny robusto with an excellent draw and burn. The smoke is sweet and woody with hints of peanut and cocoa powder and a slightly dry finish.
U.S.: \$5.75 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MATILDE SERENA ROBUSTO

Draped in an attractive claro wrapper, this cigar meshes floral, cedary notes with touches of fruit and cocoa nibs. The finish is short and tart, smacking of citrus.
U.S.: \$7.99 U.K.: N/A

89



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2017

RAMON ALLONES SPECIALLY SELECTED

Initial floral notes and molasses become spicy with a bit of bite, but intermittent intonations of chocolate and white wine throw this cigar a bit out of balance.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.30

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.,
U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
BINDER: INDONESIA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO

ALL OUT KINGS SMASH

A dark, oily robusto that smokes evenly, delivering big notes of earth and charcoal alongside sweeter impressions of cedar and licorice. The finish is toasty.
U.S.: \$13.80 U.K.: N/A

88



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2016

JUAN LOPEZ SELECCIÓN NO. 2

An attractive robusto whose initial tangy and floral character becomes stronger with touches of pepper, dusty charcoal and strong woods.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.53

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 55 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA,
BRAZIL
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

**BALMORAL AÑEJO XO
ROTHSCHILD MASIVO**

This fat robusto shows notable sharp notes of wood and dried garlic. Traces of sweetness precede the metallic finish.
U.S.: \$9.79 U.K.: N/A

86



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

DEBONAIRE ROBUSTO

Though earthy and oaky with some red wine acidity, an underlying damp, mushroom-like taste hurt the score. The draw and burn are even.
U.S.: \$12.96 U.K.: N/A

86



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

EIROA CBT MADURO 50 X 5

Hints of mustiness emerge in between the core notes earth, licorice and pine. It's a dark robusto with an easy draw and strong, full-bodied finish.
U.S.: \$11.12 U.K.: N/A

86



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

OLIVA SERIE G ROBUSTO

A sweet-and-sour smoke that becomes at times overly tangy and at other times quite gummy. The finish is dry.
U.S.: \$5.84 U.K.: N/A

85

Cigars are listed first by country and then by score. Please refer to the main tasting pages for notes and prices.

CIGAR AFICIONADO'S 100-POINT SCALE

Classic
95–100
Outstanding
90–94
Very good to excellent
80–89
Average to good
commercial quality
70–79
Don't waste your money
60–69
Not available
n/a

*Note: all prices are
manufacturers' suggested
retail, before taxes.*

BAHAMAS

89 Graycliff Crystal Pirate

COSTA RICA

91 MBombay Habano Corona

CUBA

94 Romeo y Julieta Short Churchill
92 Diplomaticos No. 2
92 Montecristo No. 3
91 Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 1
90 Cohiba Robusto
90 Montecristo No. 1
90 Partagás Corona Senior (Tubo)
90 Romeo y Julieta Churchill
89 H. Upmann Magnum 50
89 H. Upmann Majestic
89 Ramon Allones Specially Selected
88 Juan Lopez Selección No. 2

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

91 Arturo Fuente Don Carlos Personal Reserve
90 Arturo Fuente Churchill Maduro
90 E.P. Carrillo Dusk Stout Toro
90 H. Upmann Vintage Cameroon Corona
90 La Aurora 1495 No. 4
90 Manuel Quesada 70th Belicoso
89 Ashton 8-9-8
89 Ashton Heritage Puro Sol Robusto
89 Flores y Rodriguez Connecticut Valley Reserve Azul Figurado
89 La Aurora 1903 Cameroon Robusto
89 La Flor Dominicana Air Bender Poderoso
89 Matilde Serena Robusto
88 Avo Syncro South America Ritmo Toro
88 Nat Sherman Sterling Dalias
88 Partagas No. 1
88 Romeo y Julieta 1875 Cedro Deluxe No. 1
87 Aging Room Small Batch M356ii Forte
87 Davidoff Grand Cru No. 2
87 Diamond Crown Maximus Pyramid No. 3
87 Kristoff Maduro Torpedo
87 Montecristo White Especial No. 1
86 Balmoral Añejo XO Rothschild Masivo
86 Debonaire Robusto
86 Hammer + Sickie Moscow City Robusto Extra
86 Macanudo Café Baron de Rothschild
86 The Griffin's No. 300

HONDURAS

91 Rocky Patel Decade Lonsdale
89 Punch Elite EMS
88 Alec Bradley Black Market Churchill
88 Padilla Anniversary Churchill
87 Alec Bradley Prensado Torpedo
86 Eiroa CBT Maduro 50 x 5

NICARAGUA

92 601 Red Label Habano Torpedo
92 Oliva Serie V Belicoso
92 Rocky Patel Platinum Limited Edition Habano Toro
92 Tatuaje La Vérité La Vérité 2013
91 Archetype Axis Mundi Churchill
91 CAO L'Anniversaire Cameroon Belicoso
91 Illusione Fg
91 Maestro del Tiempo 5205
91 Nat Cicco Aniversario 1965 Liga No. 4 Churchill
91 Nestor Miranda Collection Corojo Toro
91 Padrón Londres
90 H. Upmann by AJ Fernandez Robusto
90 L'Atelier Côte d'Or 2017
90 Liga Privada T52 Toro
89 Bellas Artes Short Churchill
89 El Galan Habano Natural Churchill
89 Joya de Nicaragua Antaño 1970 Churchill
89 La Aroma de Cuba Corona
89 Las Mareas Ciclopes
89 Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Superior Maduro
89 Pedro Martín Maduro Toro
89 Undercrown Shade Flying Pig
88 All Out Kings Smash
88 CroMagnon Aquitaine Mode 5
88 My Father Cedros Deluxe Cervantes
88 San Lotano Connecticut Churchill
88 Villiger Colorado Toro
87 Casa Magna Colorado Churchill
87 Charter Oak CT Shade Petit Corona
87 Roberto P. Duran Signature Taño
85 Oliva Serie G Robusto

U.S.A.

90 Casa Fernandez Aganorsa Leaf Robusto
89 La Palina Collection Mr. Sam Corona
88 Don Pepin Garcia Original Delicias

MONTE 
AJ FERNANDEZ

WHEN
EXCELLENCE
MEETS
BOLDNESS



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SURGEON GENERAL WARNING: Cigar
Smoking Can Cause Cancers Of The Mouth
And Throat, Even If You Do Not Inhale.



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connoisseur's corner

Large Cuban cigars made from superb tobaccos tend to be ideal candidates for aging, and it's hard to find a better example than a Hoyo de Monterrey Double Corona. One of our original Cigar Stars of Cuba, a 1996 Hoyo Double showed that it has aged masterfully, scoring a near-perfect 98 points thanks to its delivery of rich, sweet, chocolaty flavor. Close behind was the Edmundo Dantes Conde 109, prized by connoisseurs as one of the best Cuban Regional Edition cigars ever made. A pair of legendary figurados, the Bolivar Belicoso Fino and Montecristo No. 2, scored classic ratings of 96 points, as did the lesser-known Punch Super Selection No. 1, plucked from a cabinet of 50. All of the cigars here showed how a little—or a lot—of patience can be rewarding.



HOYO DE MONTERREY DOUBLE CORONA (1996)

The wrapper on this big cigar is deep brown and smooth. The cigar opens up to show lovely cinnamon notes with hints of chocolate and touches of nutmeg on the smooth finish. This has aged into a near-perfect smoke. —*Marvin R. Shanken*

98



EDMUNDO DANTES CONDE 109 EXCLUSIVO MEXICO (2007)

If you look quickly you might mistake a Conde 109 for a traditional double corona—but a closer look shows a slight taper to the head. It's an old Cuban size, brought back by Cuban expert Max Gutmann of Mexico. It begins with notes of caramel, coffee bean and slate, then sweetens up to show almond paste and vanilla. Elegant, refined and well balanced, it should get better with longer age. —*David Savona*

97



BOLIVAR BELICOSO FINO (2001)

Dark and nearly dripping with oils, this short figurado is big, bold and robust right from the first puff. Rolled at the end of Cuba's uncertain period of cigars that went from 1997 to 2001, this BBF smokes like Bolivars of old, with plenty of spice, black pepper and leather. It's a powerhouse, with a finish that smacks slightly of honeyed wood. A mustache-burner that's hard to put down, and one that has plenty of years left. —*David Savona*

96



MONTECRISTO NO. 2 (1982)

This pyramid, which has a medium-brown exterior, has an absolutely perfect draw. It's unusually nutty, with plenty of elegance. The cigar has a light to medium body, with plenty of nutmeg as it burns. —*Marvin R. Shanken*

96



PUNCH SUPER SELECTION NO. 1 (1995)

Dark and oily to the eye yet silky to the touch, this long corona comes from a 50-count cabinet and is a perfect example of wrapper varietals that Cuba no longer grows. Its big aroma of roasted coffee and leather recurs on the palate along with sweet touches of candy apple and hazelnut. There's still plenty of strength left in this cigar. —*Gregory Mottola*

96



DAVIDOFF MILLENNIUM ROBUSTO (2000)

A strong cedar note dominates this cigar from the very first pull. The dark, reddish-brown wrapper is smooth and beautiful, and construction is perfect. As the cigar burns evenly through the middle, there are some additional notes of light cocoa, and then a long, slightly dry finish. But the cedar taste never goes away. This cigar is ready to smoke. —*Gordon Mott*

92

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10 Things Every Cigar Smoker Should Know

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

The comforting world of premium cigars can sometimes seem bogged down by endless choices, confusing messages and opinions posing as fact. It can be a complicated, confusing hobby, even for a long-time smoker. To help navigate the maze, we've assembled a list of facts and information that aim to give insight and perspective to every level of cigar aficionado, whether novice or inveterate.

This list is by no means a Ten Commandments of cigar smoking. It's more of a basic treatise that addresses pertinent issues and highlights some of the aspects that make the premium cigar industry unique. We've also included a few useful tips that will serve to enhance the smoking experience and elevate the enjoyment of this beloved pastime.





Top: A field of sun-grown tobacco flourishes in a valley in the Dominican Republic. The crops grow from natural fertilizer. Bottom: Skilled rollers at the Partagás Factory in Cuba turn loose tobacco leaves into cigars.

1 Cigars Are a Natural and Artisanal Product

Buzzwords like “natural” and “artisanal” are overused and abused in today’s parlance, but premium, handmade cigars have truly earned the right to flaunt these credentials. They are made of one thing and one thing only—tobacco. Pure, unadulterated tobacco. Not a single leaf is chemically treated or artificially altered for taste. Everything from flavor to color is achieved through natural means—and that’s part of the cigar’s inherent beauty.

In fact, few consumable products are so natural. Perceptible

flavors, whether sweet or spicy, are naturally occurring. The various alluring shades of brown are achieved through an organic process free of dyes or ripening accelerants. There are no preservatives to increase shelf life and no sweeteners, artificial or natural. Such additives and chemicals are the domain of cigarettes and machine-made cigars, which are mass-produced in the billions.

On the craft side, rolling the perfect handmade cigar is an artisanal skill, and one that takes many years to fully master. Blending tobacco is as much art as it is science, and because tobacco is subject to the whims of nature, the blender must be able to work effectively with an ingredient that can change from year to year due to crop variations.

Like wine, some vintages are better than others, but cigarmakers will do everything in their power to ensure that their product is consistent, even though crop quality is highly dependent on the weather. Consistency, however, isn’t the same thing as

cloning, and there will always be minute variations from cigar to cigar. As with any handmade product, no two premium cigars will be exactly alike. The finest, most sincere cigars are natural expressions of both the cigarmaker and the soil from which the tobacco was grown.

2 Two Hundred Pairs of Hands

It’s often said that 200 pairs of hands touch your cigar before it makes it to your humidor. Some claim the number is even higher. Suffice to say, every time you light up a cigar, many, many people with many different skills all contributed to bring you the ultimate handmade product.

It starts with seed selection and greenhouse cultivation. Cigar tobacco starts as a tiny seed, most often planted in a tray and grown in a greenhouse. Once the seedlings are a few inches high, they’re transplanted to the fields where they can flourish. At full height and maturity, the leaves are removed by hand, harvested and hung in a curing barn to dry and turn brown. That’s a few dozen hands before the tobacco has even left the farm.

The cured tobacco is then taken to a facility, unpacked and piled up for fermentation. When fermentation is complete, the tobacco pile is separated and laid on drying racks to air out. Then, it’s all repacked and stowed for aging. After a few years, the aged tobacco is unpacked again, rehydrated in a special misting room and categorized for color. That’s a few more dozen hands.

The outer wrapper leaves will also undergo destemming or *despalillo*, a process where the thick, central vein is removed from the leaf. Sometimes that step is done completely by hand, other times the tobacco is fed through a stripping machine. For filler, a worker will remove part of the stem by hand, leaving the rest intact. More hands.

Don't forget the rolling process, which requires appointed factory workers to dole out the proper proportions of aged tobacco to the rollers each day. The *torcedor* takes his pile of leaves back to his rolling table and recreates the cigar according to the cigarmaker's blend, bunching and rolling each cigar by hand. The blend is formulated of exacting proportions of very specific tobaccos to impart a very particular smoking experience—a formulation that puts more hands on your cigars.

Finished cigars are sorted for color consistency, then sent to the aging room. Finally, they're banded up, boxed and sent out. This is the basic chronology of how a cigar is made. There are, of course, plenty of other quality-control steps that vary from operation to operation, and nearly all are completed entirely by hand, but the point is this: a single hand-rolled cigar is a massive human effort that requires hands-on expertise on every level.

3 Tobacco Undergoes Fermentation

Fermentation is common to producers of wine and spirits, defined as a process that converts sugars in organic material to alcohol, often with the use of yeast. In the tobacco industry, it's more of a microbial fermentation—one that breaks down the leaf organically through the use of water, pressure and oxygen. No alcohol is produced in tobacco fermentation, but the process releases heat as it changes the chemical composition and physical traits of the leaf through humidity and oxidization.

Tobacco undergoes fermentation for one simple reason: it makes the tobacco taste better. The process affects the flavor and smell of tobacco, making it less astringent and reducing bitterness while bringing out its more floral, nutty and sweeter aspects.

Fermentation is fairly simple. Once tobacco has been cured in a barn, the leaves are arranged in large piles known as *pilónes*. The only thing added is water. The weight of the piles produce pressure while the enzymatic and microbial breakdown produces the heat. The piles are checked daily and the temperature is monitored. When the internal temperature of these *pilónes* reaches a certain point, the tobacco pile is taken apart, rotated by hand and painstakingly reassembled.

Ideally, tobacco is piled and fermented according to size and type. Different-sized leaves and different tobacco varieties will ferment at different rates, so the pile must be as homogenous as possible. The idea is to naturally alter the taste of the tobacco and transform it from its raw, bitter state to something smokeable and pleasant. Underfermented tobacco will often have a harsh aftertaste and smell like ammonia. It's not a process that can be skipped or rushed and is critical in the world of premium cigars.

4 Aging is Important

Aging tobacco plays a vital role, both before and after the cigar is made. Not only is the fresh leaf aged before it's rolled into a cigar, but a newly completed cigar in most cases is then sent to an aging room where the tobaccos marry and the humidity levels of the cigar can stabilize.

Tobacco leaves are aged after fermentation. During aging, the leaves are packed up into tight parcels called bales where they undergo a slow, steady breakdown of carotenoids, which helps to bring out the desirable properties in the tobacco. The aging also lends a bit of polish and maturity, helping to rid the tobacco of vegetal or "green" notes. Ever smoke tobacco that tastes like freshly cut grass or raw green beans? That tobacco has not been fully aged. If the cigar smoke is more redolent of almond, raisin



Tobacco is arranged in enormous piles (*pilónes*) for fermentation. The combination of pressure, water and naturally occurring heat will rid the tobacco of undesirable properties like bitterness.

and orange blossom, it has been aged properly.

But there's a tertiary aging, and that's done by the consumer. Once the cigar is boxed up and sent to the shops, a consumer may wish to age the cigars even longer. Similar to aging wine, this process helps to further dissipate any acidity in the tobacco and allows its mellower more nuanced personality to come through.

Perfect aging is achieved when you bring a cigar to its absolute peak of flavor. At peak, flavors are not only at their most balanced and cohesive, but all undesirable qualities such as bitterness or harshness are completely absent. A great cigar can age for decades so long as the temperature and humidity are stable throughout.

There are some caveats. Don't over-age the cigar. Over-aging can result in loss of flavor and body, making the cigar taste flat and dusty. Another thing to know: aging a bad, sour cigar won't make it any better. It will just make it bitter and old.

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FEATURED CIGAR

**ASHTON SYMMETRY
BELICOSO**
DOM. REP. • PRICE: \$12.25 • BODY: MEDIUM TO FULL
For a full tasting, see page two.

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POINTS

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Montecristo No. 2	Cuba	92
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TOP 25 CIGARS OF 2016

THE BEST CIGARS OF THE YEAR will be showcased in the February issue of *Cigar Aficionado* along with the top-rated Best Buys and most exciting New Releases of 2016. But don't forget the regular tasting section, where we also rated 83 cigars. For a preview of the issue's top-scoring smokes, turn to page two.

FIDEL CASTRO: 1926–2016

THE ASHES OF CUBA'S FORMER PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO were interred on Sunday in a tomb that reads "Fidel" on a plaque. He died on November 25 and was cremated before his ashes were brought to Santiago de Cuba, 540 miles southeast of Havana and the birthplace of Castro's Revolution. He ruled Cuba for decades after overthrowing the previous Batista regime in 1959 and has been widely regarded as a controversial figure ever since. Many mourned Castro's death as the passing of a benevolent leader. A few hundred miles away in Miami, others saw him as an oppressive dictator and celebrated his death in the streets. Turn to page five for the obituary.

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CIGAR WATCH

FROM THE EDITORS OF CIGAR AFICIONADO
SEPT. 27, 2016 | SIGN UP

COHIBA MACASSAR | EXPERIENCE LUXURY

FEATURED CIGAR

Punch Gran Puro Santa Rita (91 Points)

The Punch Gran Puro line came onto the scene in 2003 as General Cigar's only Honduran puro, meaning that it uses only tobacco from Honduras. The Santa Rita size (4 1/2 inches by 52 ring gauge, \$5.29) recently impressed our tasting panel with notes of cashew, hints of fresh coconut and a toasty finish, earning a score of 91 points in August's *Cigar Aficionado*.

[Click For More Punch Gran Puro Ratings](#)

11 Cigars You Should Be Smoking Right Now

Cigar Aficionado's 133rd blind tasting, which appeared in our August 2016 issue, is now live on our website. Of the 82 cigars rated by our panel of editors, 11 non-Cuban cigars scored 91 points or higher. These cigars are considered outstanding on our 100-point scale. So if you're heading to your local brick-and-mortar, here are a few cigars that are sure to please right now.

[Read Full Story](#)

La Palina Launches Value-Priced Goldie

La Palina Cigars has shipped a modified version of its popular Goldie blend called Illumination. The cigar features the same component tobaccos as Goldie minus the rare and expensive medio tiempo leaf that's nestled inside the limited-edition line of Goldie cigars.

[Read Full Story](#)
[La Palina Cigar Ratings](#)

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5 Understand Cigar Anatomy

A cigar is made up of three major parts: wrapper, binder and filler. The three form a smoking system and the single system forms a singular organism called the cigar.

The wrapper is the visible outer cover leaf. It's also the most expensive component per pound, as these tobacco leaves need to be pristine in appearance, as well as flavorful. If the leaf is too veiny, rough in texture or has any blemishes, it's no longer categorized as wrapper.

The binder can be considered a wrapper leaf that didn't make the cut. It's often the same tobacco as the wrapper, only not as smooth in appearance, and it doesn't have to be—you don't see it. Binder is the leaf of tobacco directly underneath the wrapper and holds the filler tobacco in place, hence the name. Combustion of the binder is critical, as a good-burning binder will often help the filler to burn more evenly, especially if the filler contains more oily tobaccos that do not burn easily.

The filler is where the cigarmaker can be most creative, as he can use several different types of tobacco from various countries and several different primings of tobacco for desired flavor, strength and complexity. As with the wrapper and binder, these are long-filler tobaccos that are put into place to burn slowly yet offer a fine gustatory and aromatic experience.

The foot is the end of the cigar where filler is usually visible. The head is the top, or tip and is finished with a cap, which helps to hold the wrapper in place. The neater, more symmetrical the head and cap, the greater the skill of the roller.

Good construction is key and should never be marginalized. A cigar that isn't made properly will not draw or burn properly, drastically affecting the taste and the level of enjoyment, no matter how good the raw materials.

6 Cut and Light Like a Pro

Handmade cigars don't come ready to smoke. You must cut the head, then light. While types of lighters and cutters are open to preference, some basic rules are universal. For example, cutting too much off the top of your cigar is a no-no. What's too much? If the wrapper of your cigar unravels after you lopped off the top, you've cut down too far. Normally, there's a slight taper at the head of the cigar, referred to as the shoulder. We do not recommend cutting below the shoulder line.

In the case of torpedoes and piramides, which taper drastically to a point, you shouldn't cut off so much of the head that you actually lose the taper. It's there for both functional and aesthetic reasons—to fit more comfortably in your mouth and to look nice. They are harder to make and require the work of a highly skilled roller. Also, they take longer to create, which is why they are generally more expensive. Cutting off too much defeats the entire purpose, both practically and artistically. Conversely, not cutting off enough can

result in a firm draw and a build-up of tar in the head that will ooze into your mouth, something any sane smoker wishes to avoid. But it's better to cut too little than too much—you can always cut more.

Lighting should be done delicately, similar to the way you might toast a marshmallow—with minimal direct contact. Too much direct contact of flame to tobacco and your cigar might end up tasting like pure char. It's always better to light in low-wind conditions. On top of the obvious reasons, the breeze might also cause you to compensate by using too much flame just to get a burn going. Again, this will result in an unpleasantly charry aftertaste.



Anatomy of a Cigar

The risk is even greater with powerful torch lighters, which burn at a much higher temperature than soft, natural flames. While we certainly appreciate the wind resistance and surgical control of a torch flame, you're goal is lighting a cigar, not welding pipes.

7 Smoke Cool & Slow

Some cigar smokers puff too often. This is a mistake for a few reasons. Philosophically, a cigar is about enjoyment and savoring the moment. Smoking fast runs counterintuitive to this sentiment. Take your time and slow down.

But there's a more concrete reason as well. Hyper-frequent puffing will inevitably overheat your cigar and cause it to become bitter. Often, that bitterness is irreversible.

A perfectly constructed cigar is made to burn slow and cool in order to impart flavor in a steady progression. While there are no set laws as to how long a cigar should last, we believe that a five-inch cigar should last you at least 45 minutes. If you're sucking down a five-inch robusto in 10 minutes, you're treating the cigar like a cigarette, and that's a big mistake. Puffing every 30 seconds to a minute should be an appropriate interval.

Keep in mind that smoking too slowly could have a negative consequence as well. Puff too infrequently, and your cigar will go out, meaning you'll have to relight it over and over again. Constantly lighting an extinguished cigar could introduce unpleasant flavors of char, carbon, sulfuric fumes and bitterness. But don't sweat a relight now and then.

Leave the ash on for as long as you can. The ash serves as a temperature regulator and minimizes contact between the air and

the lit tobacco, thus keeping it cooler. Great cigars are made of whole leaves, not chopped up tobacco. Those leaves have structure, and will hold an ash of a size that's surprising to a novice.

8 Choose Your Cigar Wisely

It's important to know something about the blend before choosing a cigar. This helps to ensure you don't choose a smoke that's too strong or too mild. You don't have to know every last tobacco component of the cigar to make an informed choice, but you should always have a basic idea of the cigar's strength level before you buy it.

Most smokers know if they want a strong, medium or mild cigar. Strength and body refer to the cigar's inherent intensity. One could smoke a cigar that is full of flavor, yet not particularly strong or full-bodied, meaning there's still plenty of finessed flavor that won't impact the palate too heavily.



The cigar choices in a well-stocked retail humidor can be overwhelming. A little bit of knowledge about the blend and strength can go a long way.

Sometimes, smokers want full, intense palate stimulation along with heavy flavors, much the way a coffee drinker wants a strong shot of espresso or a wine drinker wants a high-alcohol cabernet. That requires powerful tobaccos. Typically, a full-bodied, powerful cigar will contain ligero tobacco. These are the darkest, thickest leaves of the tobacco plant as well as the most oily and rich on account of their direct exposure to the sun.

Leaves tend to get less powerful as they grow lower down the stalk of the plant. Categorized as visos and secos, these lower-priming tobaccos are more nuanced in flavor and have better combustion. A full-bodied blend will contain more ligeros, a medium-bodied blend, more secos and visos.

You can't always tell, however just by looking at the cigar. Dark, oily wrappers often indicate a strong smoke the way light wrappers often indicate a mild or medium-bodied smoke, however looks can sometimes be deceiving. Our ratings will point you in the right direction.

Also, beware the "sangria effect." That happens when the cigar's strength sneaks up on you. You think it's a mild or medium-bodied cigar based on the easygoing flavors, but then when you try to stand up, you realize you can't.

9 Cubans Aren't Always the Best

As long as people smoke premium cigars, there will always be the proud debate as to which cigars are the best, and the argument usually boils down to Cuban cigars vs. non-Cuban cigars.

Lifelong Habanophiles will always preach "inimitable Cuban taste" while more universal cigar fans retort "Cubans are over-rated." It is this magazine's opinion that Cuban cigars are great, but they are not alone in their greatness. The best Nicaraguan, Dominican and Honduran cigars can compete on the quality level with the finest Cubans.

The top-tier smokes of the major cigar-producing nations are all outstanding in their own way. They are true agricultural and artisanal expressions of their respective countries. This is evident in our tasting sections and in our Top 25 Cigar of the Year awards. Sometimes a Cuban cigar wins, sometimes it doesn't, as in our most recent Top 25, which was won by a Dominican cigar.

10 Price v. Quality

Price isn't always an indicator of quality. A cigar that costs \$30 won't always be more enjoyable than a cigar that costs \$10. Inexpensive cigars sometimes score better than pricey ones in our blind tastings. At the same time, it's important to understand that the best materials, finest construction and most acute quality control will cost money. As is true with all raw materials, not all tobacco is of equal quality. Some crops are better than others.

You might have heard (or read) a few rather ignorant maxims like "tobacco's tobacco" or "all tobacco is basically the same." Statements like that are uninformed, and they presuppose that different levels of quality do not exist. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Standards of quality are determined by appearance, combustion, aroma and flavor. A highly aromatic, flavorful tobacco that is pristine in appearance and elastic to the touch is going to be more expensive than a coarse leaf that doesn't have much smell or taste.

Some tobaccos also take longer time to age and ferment for maximum performance. That process will also end up raising the cost of your cigar—the longer the cycles, the longer the tobacco has to be stored in a warehouse, and that costs money.

The tobacco could be a low-yielding varietal, meaning that the crop was not large in the field, yet the small amounts produced were outstanding. This could also make your puros a little pricier. Sometimes it's merely a question of supply and demand.

Occasionally, a cigar is expensive for arbitrary or gimmicky reasons that have nothing to do with quality or availability. Those unfortunate exceptions are not normal in the premium cigar industry. If a cigar is expensive, the cost is usually justified.

That being said, there's no guarantee you're going to love the expensive cigar. The flavor profile and strength level (either high or low) of a high-end smoke might not be to your taste. The best way to know is to try it. If you spend the extra money and find that the experience doesn't justify the cost, then stay within your comfortable price range. If you find extraordinary levels of flavor, refinement and complexity, you'll know the cigar was worth the splurge. ❖

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The New Cuba Plan

President Trump is ending the short-lived Obama-era détente with Cuba BY PETER KORNBLUH



President Trump in June in Miami, announcing his sweeping changes to America's Cuba policy. "I am canceling the last administration's completely one-sided deal with Cuba," he said.

Cuban government end human rights violations and democratize. "With God's help," he promised the cheering audience of Cuban-Americans that included dissidents and veterans of the Bay of Pigs invasion, "a free Cuba is what we will soon achieve."

With Rep. Mario Diaz Balart and Florida Sen. Marco Rubio—reportedly the chief architects of the new, hard-line policy—at his side, Trump signed a new Presidential Directive, which will curtail travel to, and commerce with, the island in the future.

"Effective immediately I am canceling the last administration's completely one-sided deal with Cuba," Trump declared. "I am announcing a new policy, just as I promised during the campaign. Our policy will seek a much better deal for the Cuban people and for the United States of America."

When President Donald Trump traveled to Miami on June 16th to announce he was "canceling" Obama's historic opening with Cuba, he made no mention of one of the most popular elements of his predecessor's policy: the ability of U.S. travelers to purchase and repatriate as many Cuban cigars as they can carry. But, in both tone and substance, the president halted the progress toward normalized relations between Washington and Havana, signaling that the brief era of détente with Cuba will not continue while Trump occupies the Oval Office.

Trump made his announcement at a rally held at the Manuel Arttime Theater in Miami's Little Havana—the stronghold of hardline opposition to engagement with Cuba—and a venue symbolic of the violent history of U.S.-Cuban relations; Arttime was a leader of the ill-fated, CIA-led, Bay of Pigs paramilitary invasion in April 1961. Using this historical backdrop, Trump denounced the dramatic breakthrough in relations during the Obama administration and issued a series of demands that the

New Sanctions

In fact, the new policy directive leaves intact much of the structure of Obama's rapprochement, initiated on December 17, 2014. The reopened U.S. and Cuban embassies will remain open; collaboration on counter-narcotics, counterterrorism and migration, among other bilateral accords, will continue as will the direct air flights and cruise ship travel authorized by Obama last year. The ability of travelers to bring home multiple boxes of cigars, remains unchanged—at least for now. (It could be modified, however, when Treasury Department regulations to implement the directive are published in the fall.)

But the eight-page directive, titled "National Security Memorandum on Strengthening the Policy of the United States Toward Cuba," rolls back other key areas of Obama's open-door policy on travel and trade with Cuba, and abandons the civility of positive engagement that defined U.S.-Cuban relations over the last two years. The document outlines "initial actions" that will "end economic practices that disproportionately benefit

the Cuban government or its military,” and “ensure adherence to the statutory ban on tourism to Cuba.”

The new directive will most immediately affect the latitude of U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba. Under Obama’s relaxation of regulations, U.S. citizens could designate the purpose of their travel under any one of 12 specific categories, which included the broadly defined “educational” travel and “people-to-people” travel. This “self-designation” mechanism has contributed to a surge in travel over the last two years, with more than 600,000 U.S. citizens visiting the island in 2016. However, Trump’s new restrictions eliminate the self-designation process, and according to the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control, “will end individual people-to-people travel.” Unless U.S. travelers qualify for one of the specialized categories of travel—journalism, religious work or academic research, for example—they will have to travel with licensed tour groups and prove they spent all their time in Cuba doing people-to-people activities. The new directive also empowers the Treasury Department to “audit” U.S. travelers; and immigration officials will be able to demand records and journals from returning travelers to demonstrate they are in compliance with the new restrictions. Those who are not could face hefty government fines. Under the new Trump regulations, those restrictions have been expanded to prohibit U.S. citizens from staying in, eating at, or spending any money at numerous state-owned hotels and other businesses that fall under the umbrella of Cuba’s business enterprise group (GAESA), a conglomerate of economic entities controlled by the Cuban military that oversees key sectors of economic and touristic activity in Cuba. Besides hotels, GAESA controls restaurants, tourism buses and other economic and tourism-related activities.

Trump’s directive means that U.S. visitors will no longer be able to stay at some of Havana’s most popular hotels, among them the elegant Saratoga favored by U.S. senators, governors and Congressional representatives who have visited Cuba over the last several years, and the Santa Isabel, where former President Jimmy Carter stayed during his two trips to the island. The five-star Gran Hotel Manzana Kempinski la Havana that opened in May also falls under the GAESA umbrella and will be off-limits to U.S. citizens. As a guide for future travelers, the State Department plans to publish a list of prohibited hotels and businesses they will have to avoid. The Trump directive also takes aim at any future U.S. financial and business transactions with GAESA-controlled entities—which will substantially limit U.S. commercial interests in doing business in Cuba. The new restrictions will not affect U.S. airlines and cruise ships, but could dramatically reduce future business engagement for U.S. manufacturers and hospitality industry suppliers who are seeking export and investment opportunities on the island. Those business interests, along with Cuban entrepreneurs whose new private sector businesses depend on U.S. tourist traffic, have forcefully lobbied the Trump administration to further open travel and trade, rather than restrict it. In early June, Google released a statement highlighting the gains in connectivity on the island; Airbnb published a revenue report showing \$40 million going to some 22,000 Cuban hosts over the last several years.

Policy Backlash

White House officials cast the new policy as a way of channeling support away from the Cuban state enterprises and into the hands of Cuban entrepreneurs. “We must channel funds toward the Cuban people and away from a regime that has failed to meet the most basic requirements of a free and just society,” reads the White House directive.

But critics of the policy point out that the new restrictions are likely to have the opposite result—hurting the emerging Cuban private sector, with fewer individual travelers staying in private Airbnb homes, and helping the state-sector with larger tour delegations forced to stay at state-owned hotels and using state-owned buses for transportation instead of privately owned taxis. (Not all state-owned operations are run by GAESA.) Numerous analysts in the travel industry warn that the higher expense of the tours, and the ominous threat of Treasury Department traveler audits would have a chilling effect on future visitation to the island, reducing the number of U.S. travelers and, along with the new restrictions on U.S. business investments, resulting in significantly less U.S. dollars spent to support private Cuban businesses that have dramatically multiplied to meet the demands of expanding U.S. tourism.

“If the goal is to help Cuban entrepreneurs, adding job-killing regulations on U.S. businesses and increasing government resources to investigate everyday Americans traveling to our island neighbor is not the answer,” according to EngageCuba, an association of U.S. businesses that supports open travel and lifting the trade embargo. “Any policy change that diminishes the ability of Americans to travel freely to Cuba is not in the best interests of the United States or the Cuban people,” says Arizona’s Republican Senator Jeff Flake, who, along with 54 other co-sponsors in the Senate, has introduced “The Freedom for Americans to Travel to Cuba Act.”

From the perspective of the Cuban government, Trump’s new policy approach, and the harsh, bullying rhetoric accompanying it, threatens a return to the decades of U.S. “regime change” efforts. Trump was resorting to “coercive methods from the past,” Cuban leaders declared in a statement published in the Communist Party newspaper, *Granma*. The statement reiterated Cuba’s willingness to engage in a respectful dialogue with Washington but warned that “any strategy aimed at changing the political, economic and social system in Cuba—whether by pressure or imposition or through more subtle means—is destined to fail.”

But the most rousing rebuttal came from the architect of President Obama’s normalization policy, former deputy national security advisor, Ben Rhodes. Writing in *The Atlantic*, Rhodes also predicted the Trump approach would fail to achieve its goals. “Trump’s announcement should be seen for what it is,” he concluded, “not as a step forward for democracy, but as the last illogical gasp of a strain of American politics with a 50-year track record of failure; one that wrongly presumes we can control what happens in Cuba.” ❖

Peter Kornbluh writes frequently for CIGAR AFICIONADO on Cuba.

The new regulations on Cuba are expected to become official policy this fall. Look for more information on the Cuba channel at cigaraficionado.com as further details emerge on how they will affect travel to Cuba, and the purchase of Cuban cigars.

moments to remember

Please send all submissions to: CIGAR AFICIONADO/Moments to Remember, Worldwide Plaza, 825 Eighth Avenue, 33rd Floor, New York, NY 10019. Or email them to: momentstoremember@mshanken.com. To order additional copies of CIGAR AFICIONADO, call 1-800-344-0763.



Marvin R. Shanken, editor and publisher of CIGAR AFICIONADO, puffs a cigar with good friends Bill Terlato (left) and Michael Gelband (right) on the Ailsa Course at Trump Turnberry in Scotland.



Jay Reid, center, smoking Fuente cigars on his wedding day at Blue Hill at Stone Barns, in Pocantico Hills, New York with, from left, Michael Laninga, Kerry Kenny, Joe Nizhnikov, Sam Renaut, Jonathan Cochran and Ben Riddick.



Hal Wilkes celebrates his birthday in North Beach, San Francisco, with Steve Beal, Joe Suggs, Dennis Wilkes, Mark Chai, John Caselli, Richard Bennett, Simon Gee and Gordon Manings.



What do you do when your boat breaks down and the axel snaps on your boat's trailer? If you are Doug Murrell, Dahl Clark and Jack Crimmins, you'll turn lemons into lemonade by lighting up a few premium cigars roadside.



After the Golden State Warriors won their second NBA championship in three years, there was only one thing left for Stephen Curry to do: light up a cigar.



Brother and sister Kevin and Kristin Mitzel share some sibling bonding time while puffing on excellent cigars at a beach wedding in Traverse City, Michigan.

BOTTOM LEFT: EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES



Doctor Ralph G. Cipriano and his father Ralph G. Cipriano celebrate his graduation from medical school with Hoyo de Monterrey cigars in Grenada.



Khaki and Elliott Jessup light up their wedding day with Padrón 1964 Anniversary cigars and Pappy Van Winkle whiskey in Knoxville, Tennessee.



John and Peter Blevins spend some quality father and son time while puffing on premium cigars by the water on Monkey Island in Grand Lake, Oklahoma.



Pat Gallagher, Erin Fitzgerald and Ed Curley indulge in premium cigars and libations at the 143rd running of the Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs.



Jon Swope and his father-in-law Jim Coleman enjoy Cuban cigars while golfing at the Els For Autism tournament at Troon North in Scottsdale, Arizona.



Del Arrington of Arizona celebrates his 50th birthday with good friend Darnell Robinson of Chicago, Illinois, at the Bond Lounge in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Art Klein and Tim Ferranti puff on a couple of La Flor Dominicana Andalusian Bulls, CIGAR AFICIONADO's 2016 Cigar of the Year, in Washington, New Jersey.



Rob Talley introduces his son Darius to the good life on his 21st birthday by pairing Cohiba Siglo II cigars alongside fine libations in Temecula, California.



There's no better way to spend a Sunday than watching football while smoking premium cigars with friends. The Minnesota Herf Connection gathers at Churchill's Quality Cigars and Gifts in Victoria, Minnesota, to watch the Minnesota Vikings defeat the Houston Texans to remain undefeated at 5-0.



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Celebrating graduation at Greenwich High School: (top) Jake Cohen, Truman Imbo, Paul Williams, (middle) Dylan Ruebenstahl, Conor Harkins, Kevin Lobbi, Christian Novakowski, Cole Hartley, Wesley Keelan, Akira Dunham, Blake Guerrieri, Connor Weigold, (bottom) Ewan Trogni, Luis Carrillo.



Clay Young (center) enjoys fine cigars at his fundraiser for military veterans and first responders in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He's joined by Lawrence Steele, Justine Stewart, Taya Kyle with the Chris Kyle Frog Foundation and Robert Martin, who all partake in puffing.



Mike Raphtis rings in his 50th birthday with cigars and libations alongside Nick Alexopoulos, Frank Corrigan, Bruce Garretson, Mark Crawford, Jim Holevas, Bob Alati and Thom Kubeshesky.



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Victor Espinoza and Juan Jesus Gomez Pliego savor the moment with premium smokes at a joyous gathering to celebrate the 70th birthday of Juan's mother-in-law in Toluca, Mexico.



Lieutenant Colonel Mark R. Owens celebrates 32 years of service in the United States Army by enjoying a cigar after his retirement ceremony aboard the *USS Alabama* in Mobile, Alabama.



Cigar lovers and regulars at The Town Tavern in Blowing Rock, North Carolina, bid farewell to hostess Alexa before she leaves her job to attend graduate school at Appalachian State.



Newlyweds Nick and Jordan Barbera from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, fire up a couple of fine Rocky Patel cigars before watching the sunset while on their honeymoon in Maui, Hawaii.



Groomsmen enjoy fine Montecristo No. 2 cigars and premium glasses of Bourbon before the wedding of Brett and Ally Wells in the lounge of the Ritz-Carlton on Grand Cayman.



Helen Hernandez, Jerry Hernandez, Marian Koh, Carr Villabroza, Edwin Koh and Sedge Villabroza take a moment to fire up a few Montecristo No. 4s while on vacation in Iceland.

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Father of the bride Michael Botto sneaks away for a mid-reception cigar at Nazareth's Fine Cigars in Beverly Hills, California. Bride Allison Botto Johnson knew just where to find him.



A group of cigar lovers meet at Carmack's Cigar Shop in Noblesville, Illinois, to light up handrolled cigars and enjoy conversation with Nestor Miranda of Nestor Miranda Cigars.



Firefighters from the city of Markham, Ontario, Canada, have a smoke at The Cigar Bodega in Unionville, Ontario, Canada. From left: Barry Vesh, Andrew Tamburo, Matt Lum and Howie Tse.

Leave compromise
behind.



Theresa Salerno, Will Fogg, Tyler Kupper and Stekki and Brian Millman tailgate with cigars and libations before the New York Giants game at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey.



Richard Meschke, Cliff Wright, Michael Meschke and Robert Meschke enjoy cigars while sipping on Johnny Walker Scotch to celebrate Cliff's daughter's wedding in Atlanta, Georgia.



Michael Kastner crosses No. 1 off his bucket list, as he and his son Kevin light up a couple of fine Padrón Serie 1926 cigars after completing the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu in Peru.



Axis Mundi



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Friends Pincho Negron, Joe Kuchler and Irving Ocher head outside to start off the summer by enjoying a couple of premium handrolled cigars on a beautiful day in Voorhees, New Jersey.



Marylyn Harrell, her father Robb and uncles Ben and John Harris celebrate Thanksgiving and Marylyn's acceptance to Georgetown Law School with premium cigars in Annapolis, Maryland.



Jeff Dykes, Danette Scudder, Bill Carroll and Jody Wigginton smoke a few cigars while playing a round and sporting colorful outfits at Gaylord Springs Golf Links in Nashville, Tennessee.



Ted Henry and Gregory M. Kane from Springfield, Illinois, light up atop a mountain range while digging for fish fossils in Green River, Wyoming.



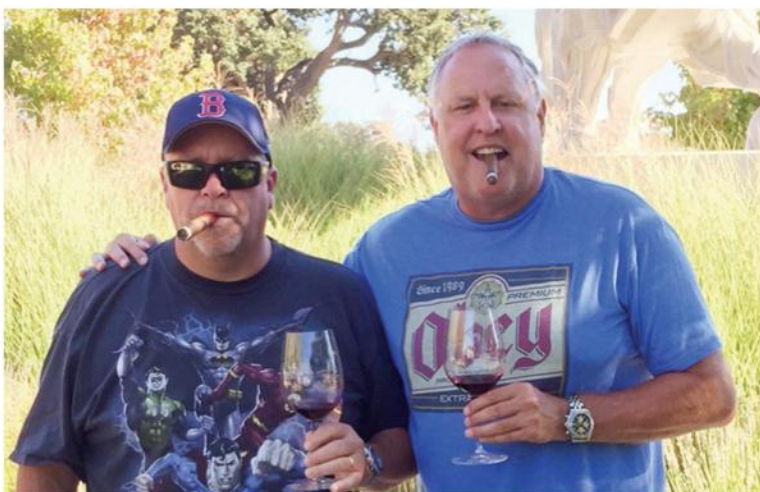
Bubba Hosley, Mike Macomson and Brian Harris get ready to light up their victory cigars at the Nascar Golf Tournament in Norwood, North Carolina.



Julian Cunha of the JJS Cigar Shop in Aruba helps Danny Moffett choose a Cohiba. Julian has since passed and his wife Angelique runs the shop in his honor.



Chris Coome celebrates his graduation from McMaster University with his father John Coome at Pebble Beach Golf Links in Pebble Beach, California.



Bill and Eric Caudle celebrate Bill's 50th birthday by spending the afternoon with fine wine and cigars at Sculpterra Winery in Paso Robles, California.



Friends of 52 years, Lawrence Hewes and Harry Sober share a couple of fine cigars while sipping aged rum at a mountain hunting cabin in western Virginia.

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1 PORTABLE FIZZ—DRINKMATE

Fans of Highballs (see page 43) have long enjoyed at-home seltzer-making devices that save time and space. Drinkmate takes that concept a few steps further with its beverage carbonator and new portable edition, the Spritzer. Each easily adds bubbles to the water you supply from the tap or a bottle. But its clever innovation is the ability to carbonate any beverage from fruit juice to tea to wine and cocktails. With the Spritzer you can carry your bubbles to the party. Is there a carbonator in the house? idrinkproducts.com

2 TAILOR AT THE DOOR—BOOKATAILOR

Every self-respecting man deserves a bespoke suit, but the act of visiting a tailor and getting measured can feel a bit dated and tedious. BookATailor streamlines the process. First, you book an appointment online with a “SmartTailor” who will visit at the time and place of your convenience. The SmartTailor builds your profile through a series of detailed measurements and saves it in a database for future alterations (or additional suits). Finally, you get to choose from a large catalog of fabrics from such luxury houses as Ermenegildo Zegna, Dormeuil, Loro Piana and Carlo Barbera. The information is sent directly to the company’s factory, and after four weeks, you’ll receive your suit. bookatailor.com

3 BOURBON BUBBLES—ARCHER HOME

Problem: How to make a man do the dishes? Solution: Soap that smells like whiskey...or rum...or tequila. Surprisingly, it wasn’t a woman who came up with this. The founders of the Archer line are three dudes who first felt the world needed masculine alternatives to floral air fresheners, and so they made European Sports Car (leather), Distillery (barrel char and sour mash) and Hunting Lodge (gun powder and damp timber) scents. archermen.com

4 MAJESTIC MINIBAR—BDI

Keeping booze for guests who wish to partake is a good idea, but hiding your stash of top-shelf spirits for you to enjoy later is an even better one. The Corridor Bar from BDI (\$2,199), a “soft minimalist” styled bar made of solid stained wood, features two slotted doors that not only hold your bottles, but also swing open to reveal a space large enough for all your beverage needs. Inside is a stemware rack to hold Martini and wine glasses, storage drawer for any cocktail tools and plenty of slots for wine and spirits bottles. The attractive, satin-etched glass top is also durable enough to resist scratches and fingerprints. bdiusa.com

5 GONE WITH THE CIGAR CASE—JULIEN’S AUCTIONS

If you watch *Gone With the Wind* not for the melodrama and flowing gowns, but the cigar-smoking scenes, Julien’s Auctions has a sale for you. The Los Angeles-based auction house for the stars is putting Rhett Butler’s equestrian-themed gold cigar case on the block during a two-day auction beginning November 17. Other movie props made by Joseff of Hollywood for sale include Scarlett O’Hara necklaces, earrings worn by Marilyn Monroe and a serpent cuff and belt donned by Elizabeth Taylor in *Cleopatra*. juliensauctions.com

6 FIT TO BE TIED—STERLING ASCOTS

The desire to sport something unusual on a trip to Miami revealed to entrepreneur J. Sterling a general lack of ascots on the clothing market and inspired his quest to create a line of colorful cravats. Sterling tapped into his grandmother’s sewing skills to make patterns. He and his sister Ayanna Soleil then combed the world for suitable fabric designs in both silk and microfiber. The short, stylish scarves are perfect at conferring flair on an otherwise casual outfit or for use at elegant events. sterlingascots.com



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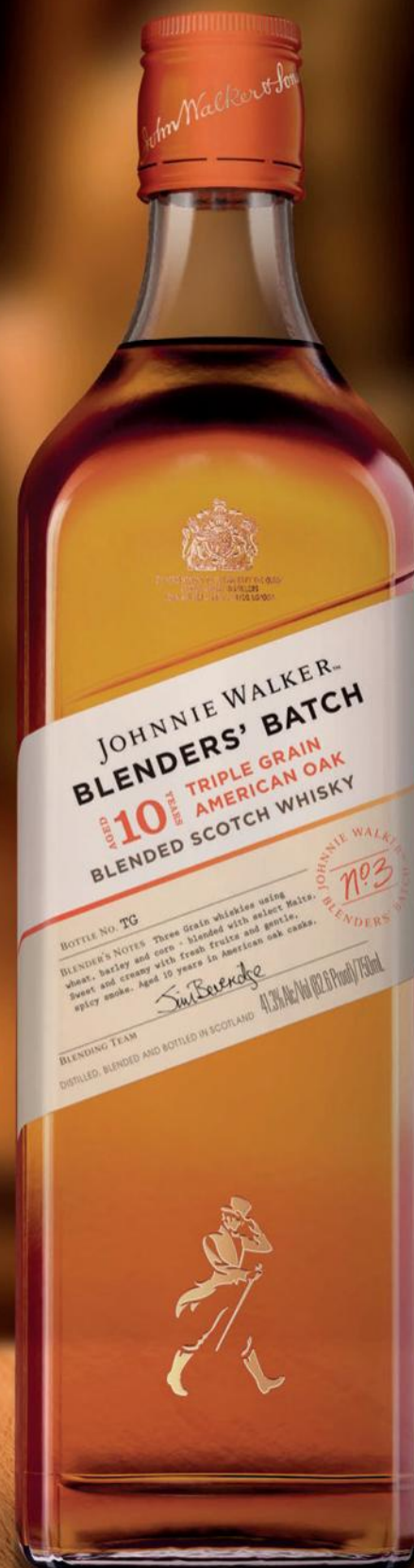
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